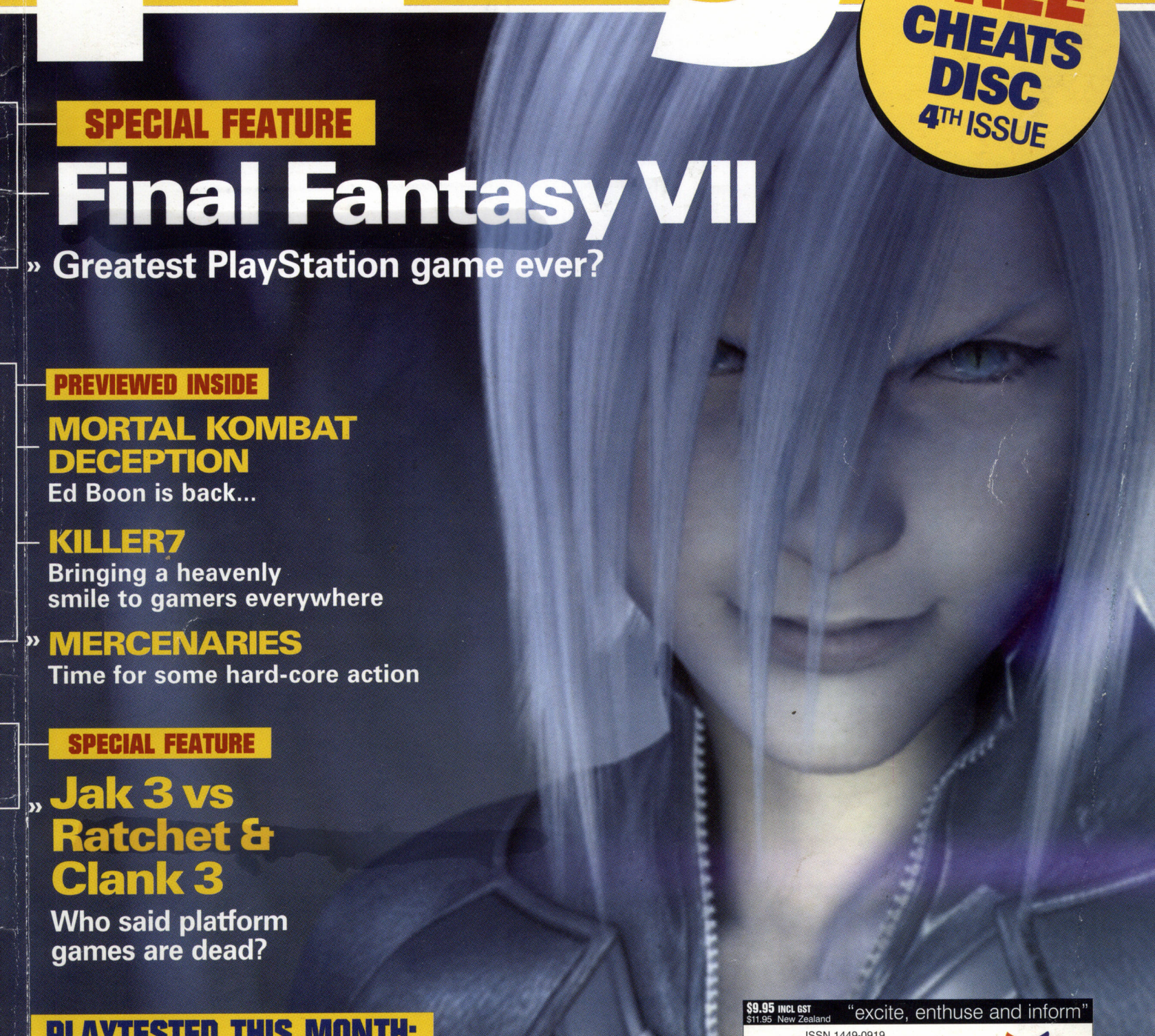
AUSTRALIA'S UNOFFICIAL PLAYSTATION®2 MAGAZINE

play TM

ISSUE FOUR

FREE CHEATS DISC 4TH ISSUE



SPECIAL FEATURE

Final Fantasy VII

» Greatest PlayStation game ever?

PREVIEWED INSIDE

MORTAL KOMBAT DECEPTION
Ed Boon is back...

KILLER7
Bringing a heavenly smile to gamers everywhere

» **MERCENARIES**
Time for some hard-core action

SPECIAL FEATURE

» **Jak 3 vs Ratchet & Clank 3**
Who said platform games are dead?

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» RISE TO HONOUR » FIGHT NIGHT 2004 » MOJIBRIBON » TRANSFORMERS » ALIAS
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AUSTRALIA'S BEST UNOFFICIAL PLAYSTATION2 MAGAZINE!

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CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN...

Goodness me. Can you believe it? The PS2 is the oldest and, let's face it, lowest-spec member of the current console generation. Not that you'd know it.

Have you seen the recent (and forthcoming) crop of PS2 games? Titles like *Ghosthunter, Rise to Honor* and *Killzone* look, quite frankly, fantastic. Kind of puts the console horsepower race into perspective, doesn't it?

Or perhaps you've noticed the price wars. Other consoles rely on price drops to bribe punters into buying their hardware; only the PS2 stands firm on price, insisting that it's good value for money. 72 million consoles shipped and counting...

Then there is, of course, the small matter of software. With so many games available for the PS2 (over 700 titles) there's bound to be something for everyone, right? Right. Sony could get lazy and pump out rubbish sequels. Or they could get innovative on us, and bring out products like *EyeToy* and *SingStar*.

As if all this wasn't enough, we have just three letters for you: PSP.

And three more: UMD.

At this year's E3 we finally got our hands on Sony's new portable console and it's clear that even with total dominance of the market, there are still mountains to climb, worlds to conquer... you get the picture.

We're impressed with Sony's determination not to rest on its laurels. With stiff competition from both Microsoft and Nintendo, we can't wait for the battle to unfold. It's all up for grabs once again, dear reader.

Who is the smart money backing? We think the answer to that is kind of obvious...

MICHAEL BUTLER
GROUP EDITOR



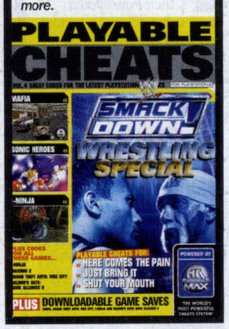
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Smackdown special: Here Comes The Pain, Just Bring It, Shut Your Mouth; plus I-Ninja, Sonic Heroes, Mafia, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II and more.



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The search for the Greatest PlayStation Game Ever continues this month with **play**™'s Mat Hoddy laying down the law and telling us why *Ico* is the only real choice. To be fair to Mat, he's actually got a pretty strong argument. Don't just take our word for it though, turn to page 24 to find out why this little piece of joy is just that.



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FINAL FANTASY VII
play™'s Nick Powell puts down some poetry to explain why *Final Fantasy VII* may well be not only the greatest RPG of all time but also the single greatest piece of software to ever enter this realm. Thankfully, the piece itself takes the game a lot more seriously than this intro does the piece.



FEATURE

Doubling up on PS2's most exciting double teams.



TWO WORLD EXCLUSIVES!

JAK 3 AND RATCHET & CLANK 3

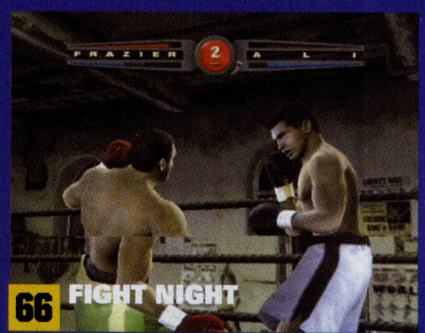
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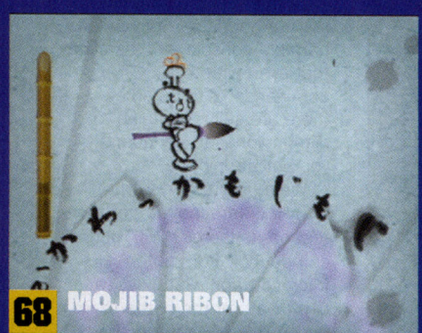
The part of the mag we slave over only for you to look at the score and turn the page. Wait, that's not true, but our reviews certainly are.



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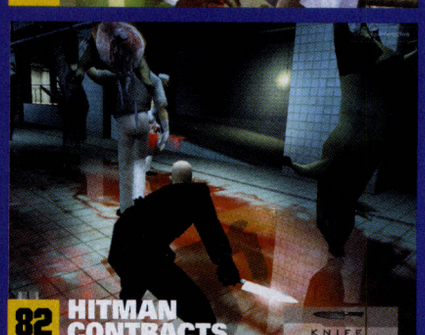
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play™ offers the kind of hard-edged opinion that can only come with experience and integrity. Its strong brand means that it is first choice for gamers who want both trustworthy and entertaining reviews. Turn to page 56 for more details.

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Games coming your way soon.

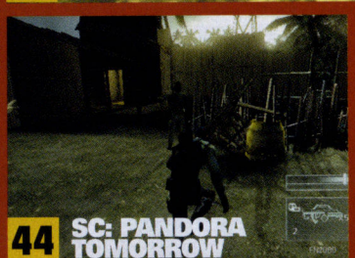


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If heaven exists, we want it to look like this



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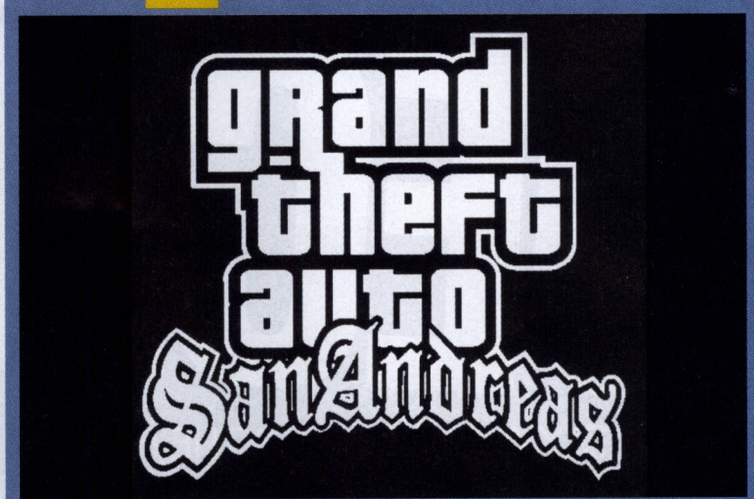
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Because we all like to do it really.

FEATURE PREVIEW

Can an old favourite be revived? play™ talks to Ed Boon about Mortal Kombat.

6 MIDWAY MAKES A KOMEBACK WITH WHAT KOULD BE THE BEST MORTAL KOMBAT YET



PUBLISHER: MIDWAY GAMES DEVELOPER: IN HOUSE RELEASE: SEPTEMBER

MORTAL KOMB DECEPTION

IF DEADLY ALLIANCE WAS THE RETURN, THEN THIS IS THE REBIRTH. GODDAMNIT, IF MORTAL KOMBAT HASN'T JUST GONE AND REINVENTED ITSELF

Now come on, hands up who was surprised by the success of *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*. [**play**™ team unanimously raises arms...] After a long period in the wilderness, last year saw Midway revive its most famous, most controversial franchise and, to be frank, we thought it didn't stand a chance. What with *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* (to name but two) the genre has moved on considerably since the days when *Mortal Kombat* ruled the arcades. The time had passed when it when it was Sub Zero versus Scorpion, fatalities and over the top blood and gore. Surely it would sink without a trace.

We couldn't have been more wrong. *Deadly Alliance* not only turned out be a more than decent game but also managed to shift the kind of numbers that *Tekken* et al could only dream about. To date, and across all formats, it's sold somewhere in the region 2.6 million units. That is what's known as a triumphant return.

It seemed that the return of *Mortal Kombat* filled a void that modern fighters had forgotten about: fun for the sake of it. Forget learning King's multiparts and all those ten-string combos, *Mortal Kombat* is a game that's all about having immediate pick up and play fun – it simply doesn't take itself too seriously. *Mortal Kombat* is all about the joy of committing an ultra violent act on your opponent, which for the most part, means on your friends. So yes, it was a huge success.

Are you ready for another surprise?

As Ed Boon, *Mortal Kombat* co-creator and top guy on *Deception*, puts it, "We're trying to do the least expected thing." *Deception* isn't simply an update of *Deadly Alliance* – as the cynical among you might expect – but is a complete reworking of the franchise. It's like they put the whole *Mortal Kombat* thing into the meat grinder, cooked it up a bit and voila! *Deception* cakes. Mmmmmmm.

Mortal Kombat: Deception is actually four games in one. They are, quickly recounting them, the one-on-one traditional fighting game, a puzzle game, a strategy board game and the build-your-own-fighter-game, all just as important to the 'new' *Mortal Kombat*. But we'll come to those last three in a minute – but first off, the fighting.

The core of the thing, naturally, is the actual fighting engine and this has had a pretty major overhaul. Keen to take in some of the feedback on *Deadly Alliance*, Midway has stayed faithful to the series (and its legion of fans) with the inclusion of some brilliant new fighters (names under wraps for now) and has included some classics – Baraka is now in lovely 3D – a move that should please countless *MK* nuts. There's the obligatory new moves with you now getting two fatality moves per character. There's also a new indicator system which is intended to educate more casual gamers to the depths that a modern beat-'em-up possesses – a simple system of traffic lights indicates when a player might be susceptible to a reversal move, or a counter (potentially a more damaging attack), or when they're just in a defensive mode and shouldn't be attacked. This is all good. The »



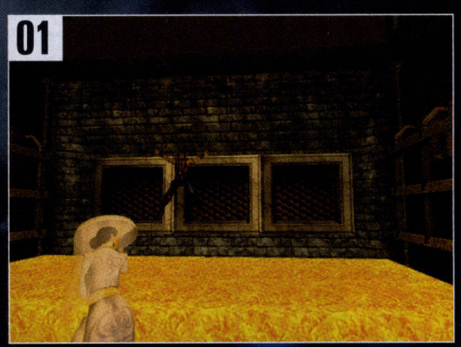




AT:

FATALLY FLOORED

Arenas can be used as weapons in their own right. Manoeuvre you opponent (or just get lucky) into the right area and with a decent blow, you'll knock them into one of many different (and suitable gory) death traps.



This guy is hit into a wall...



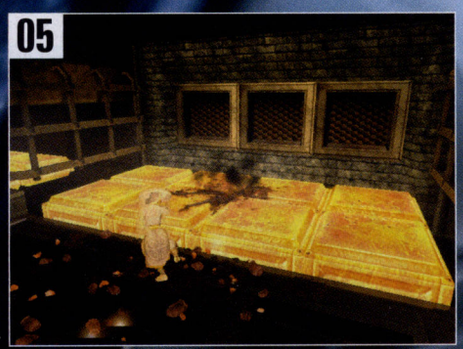
...he then slides onto a lump of molten metal.



Ow! He begins to crawl – just when you think he'll make it...



...bang! The mould slams down...



...crushing him into a bloody smear! Nice.





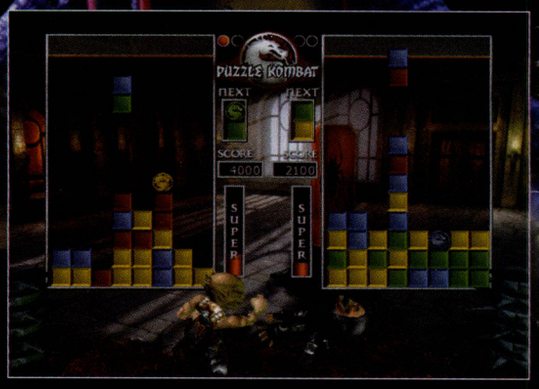


BOARDGAME

A cross between *Stratego* and *Chess*, the boardgame game sees you trying to defeat your opponent's 'king' piece – each battle on the board is decided by a single round of *Mortal Kombat*.





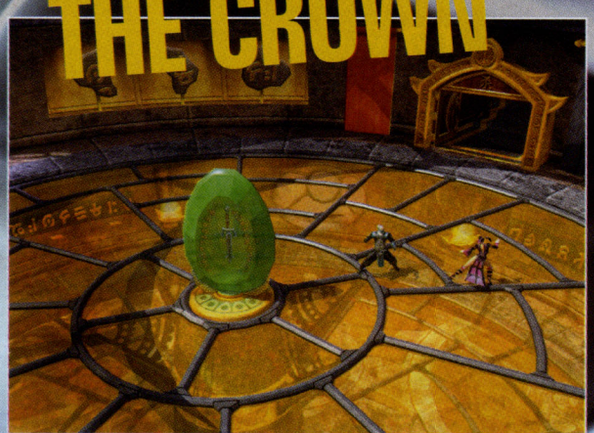


PUZZLE

It's *Puzzle Fighter* in a *Mortal Kombat* universe. No bad thing, we reckon – match the colours up, detonate them with the '*Kombat* icons and watch as the two mini fighters below slog it out!

DUEL IN THE CROWN

Some backdrops feature weapons – these not only make your fighter more powerful but also add a whole load of new moves



First you'll have to 'open up' the weapon – smashing your opponent into its case is good way to do that.



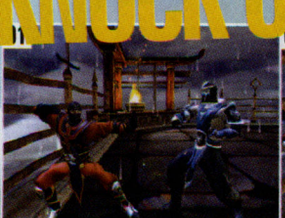
Then all you have to do is grab it...



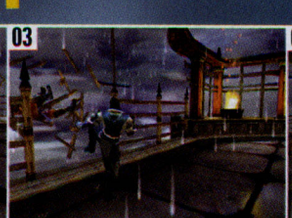
...and smash his bleedin' head in. Lovely.

KNOCK OUT PUNCH

A full sequence of shots depicting the destructible scenery. This time this guy got lucky – he only plummeted to another arena, it could have easily been a pit of spikes!











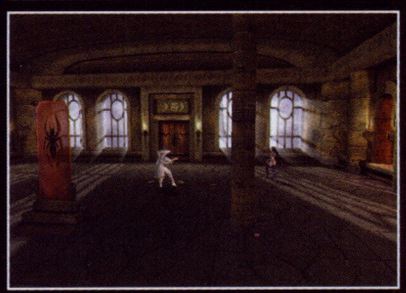


ARENAS

A small example of the variety of arenas in *Deception*. Most are huge with multiple areas, deathtraps and weapons.







KONQUEST

Or Career mode, if you will. Guide a novice fighter through six worlds of *Mortal Kombat* training him in fighting, unlocking secrets and 'living the dream'. Once complete you can use your custom fighter in the regular fighting game.



» biggest change, however, is with the fully three dimensional, interactive environments.

Each backdrop has a completely different make up, with different features encouraging you to play with different tactics. One arena we saw took place atop a volcano, with the edge of the fighting space slowly crumbling away making the arena smaller and smaller and pushing the fighters closer together. Obviously one tactic would be to force your opponent into walking onto a crumbling area and so plummet to his doom. Another might be to purposely walk onto an edge area and then reverse your opponent onto the edge just as it crumbles away.

Other arenas are far more complex and offer much more tactical scope. Many of them feature multiple areas like *DOA 2* – knock a fighter through a wall and (after a fall) the fight continues. But this is *Mortal Kombat* and here knocking an opponent into another area can have much more serious consequences. Not only will any fall do a *lot* of damage (and have a visual impact on the landing area) but there's a chance you could fall into one of the numerous traps – these could be spikes, rotating blades and grinders to name but three. And you aren't going to survive one of these. Some arenas even contain weapons – grab one of these and not only does your fighter become a far more powerful one but you get another load of moves to play with.

The idea behind this is to make every fight interesting right down to the end, so that even if one fighter has only a few pixels of health left, he still has a chance to win. Of course, *Mortal Kombat* aficionados can still fight *mano y mano*, old style rules in old style arenas. Hardcore will never die!

But this new openness shows that *Mortal Kombat* isn't afraid to evolve and change with the times. The key, we think, is that it retains the spirit of the previous games while incorporating some of the features from modern fighters. It's almost like *Mortal Kombat* has grown up.

As such, the new Konquest mode will go a long way to give you plenty of replay value and combines elements from games as diverse as SEGA's *Shenmue*, *GTA III* and *Deadly Alliance*'s own training mode. Set across six worlds, you play a single character in a kind of, well, adventure. You walk around the worlds, talk to people, find items and secrets (unlocking bonuses like in the Krypt in *Deadly Alliance*), go on quests and learn how to fight, incorporating those moves learned into your own personal fighter's skills. Think of it as an all-encompassing training/adventure game featuring the *Mortal Kombat* fighting engine.

Certain events will only become available at a specific location and at a specific time of day and some information will even be misleading, hence the name *Deception*. You begin as a 16-year-old fighter and end as 60-year-old master, your custom fighter now ready to enter (and be selected) the world of the *Mortal Kombat* Versus mode.

Aside from the traditional Versus game, Konquest is the main part of *Deception*. There is, however, much, much more to it than that.

Next up we've got the *Chess*. Yep, you read that right – *Mortal Kombat* has moved into the world of turn-based strategy. Kind of. You've played *Stratego*, right? It's a game similar to *Chess* with pieces of different values of strength and movement. Now imagine each piece on the board a character from *Mortal Kombat* – characters in different roles that you've decided on. So, say Scorpion is the character you're best versed in, you might want to make him your 'Queen' (no jokes, please). No good with Sub Zero? He could be your 'king'. Players take turns in moving their pieces with the objective being to defeat your opponent's 'King' piece – but whenever two pieces meet, a battle ensues. This is dealt with in time honoured fashion – with a round of the *Mortal Kombat* fighting game. Weaker pieces will have less energy than the stronger ones. Simple. There are also special squares on the board which can act as traps (springing pieces straight off the board without any combat) or will restore energy, again making the match more strategic. The idea is that each game of *Chess* will last no more than 10-15 minutes in total, with each player moving his pieces quickly around the board – there won't be any two-day *Chess* marathons here.

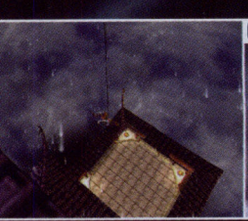
And still there's more. The final game is, ahem, 'based' on Capcom's *Super Puzzle Fighter II*, a game that appeared on PSone about six years ago. If you're not familiar with it, it's a bit like *Tetris* in that blocks fall from the top of the screen and you have to arrange them so that, when triggered, they'll fall making chains. It's a battle, after all, so while your chains send blocks over to mess up your opponent, two big-headed *Mortal Kombat* fighters slug it out at the bottom the screen. It's all highly entertaining and so, so addictive...

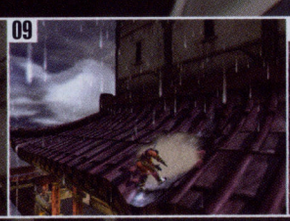
THE CORE OF THE THING, NATURALLY, IS THE ACTUAL FIGHTING ENGINE AND THIS HAS HAD A PRETTY MAJOR OVERHAUL

Actually, did we say that *Mortal Kombat* has grown up? Ha. That's not entirely true – it's still the same loveable over-the-top blood and guts fighter that dominated the sales charts and the consoles of the early nineties. It still revels in ultra violence and the visceral appeal of blood but boy, has it come a long way. *Deception* is a game that proves that a well-established franchise can move with the times and still please the fans that made it so successful in the first place.

From what we've seen of it so far it's a beat-'em-up that's falling over itself to deliver 'game' to the player. Midway could have simply added more fighters, more moves, new fatalities, a few new backdrops and people would have lapped *Deception* up. But with the Konquest mode, the board game and the puzzle game all vying for your attention, it's a game that doesn't stop giving.

Right, now what was that fatality combo again? ■



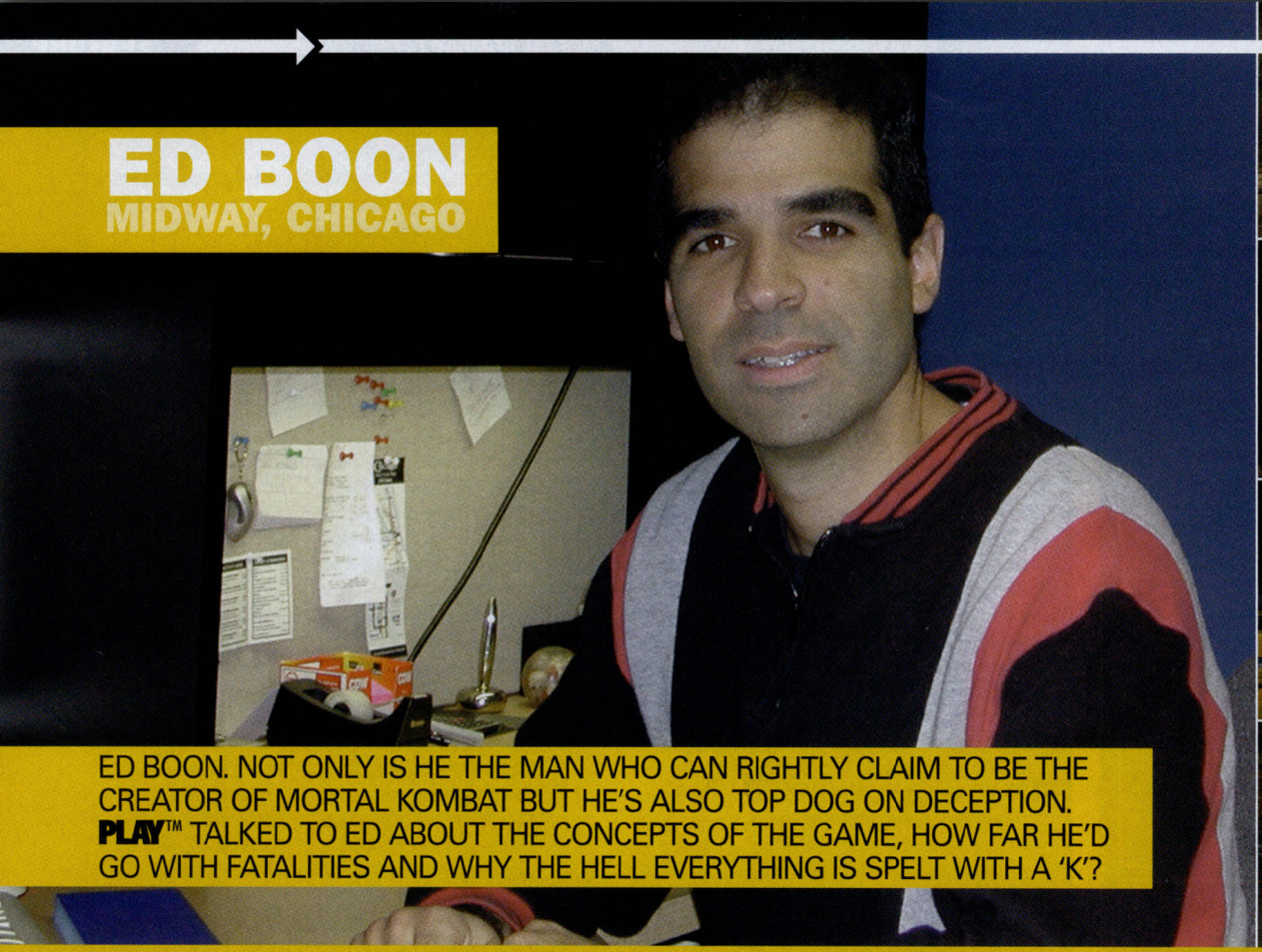







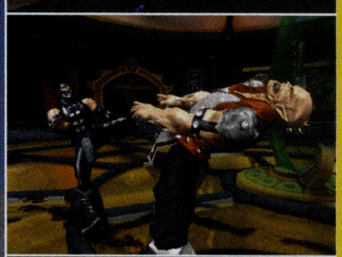


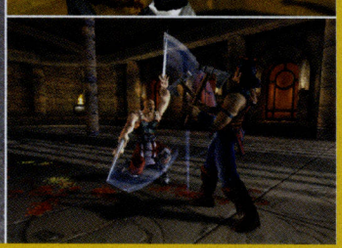
ED BOON
MIDWAY, CHICAGO











ED BOON. NOT ONLY IS HE THE MAN WHO CAN RIGHTLY CLAIM TO BE THE CREATOR OF MORTAL KOMBAT BUT HE'S ALSO TOP DOG ON DECEPTION. PLAY™ TALKED TO ED ABOUT THE CONCEPTS OF THE GAME, HOW FAR HE'D GO WITH FATALITIES AND WHY THE HELL EVERYTHING IS SPELT WITH A 'K'?

Were you surprised at the success of *Deadly Alliance*?
Yes, I mean, I was guessing we'd do okay but it really took off. Now we're at something like 2.6 million [units sold] and we were really taken aback. It's been five years almost since *Mortal Kombat 4* came out and that was on a previous generation, on the PSone, the Dreamcast and all of those. So the PlayStation2 came out and it was out a few years with no *Mortal Kombat* game and people were kind of used to the last generation. So when people saw much better presentation and the introduction of the fighting style changes. This all added something new and I think that contributed to it.

Did you get a lot of feedback from the fans?
Oh yeah, and everything we heard back was applied to this game. In the last game we had one fatality and people wanted two or three so right off the bat we knew we wanted to do that. And then we added the whole hari-kari moves, it'll be interesting to see how the reaction to that is. But basically everything was jotted down that was requested for the next game. A lot of people were asking for the old characters and this has become a big focus in the game. Of course we did receive requests for things that we couldn't possibly put in the game.

One addition are the game modes, are these just fillers?
Even the guys on the team were 'are you sure you wanna do all that kind of stuff?' and you know we got some more people on the team to handle the different modes and now when we see it coming together we're really excited about it. I had to push that whole thing, I really believe that it will be something people appreciate. I'm very confident about all this stuff.

Do you think gamers are used to the violence that has made *MK* famous?

ANYTHING THAT IS LEANING TOWARDS REALITY WE KIND OF STEER AWAY FROM, WE'RE MORE ABOUT THE UNBELIEVABLE

What with *Grand Theft Auto* and some of the horror games, I don't think *Mortal Kombat* stands out with any shock value anymore. When that first game came out it was really singled out with controversy and all that. The whole rating system wasn't in place when the first *MK* came out and when part two came out there was an M rating on it. I think *Mortal Kombat* has been around for so long now it's not as shocking.

Why the arena traps?
I wanted to make the game with as many choices as possible. You can literally have one pixel left where in the previous *Mortal Kombat* games you're pretty much dead, you can't even block, but in this game you still have a chance. Your strategy will change, so you're going to back up to the edge of this collapsing wall and you'll have a chance to win. I think having this 'it's not over till it's over' approach will make it different from other games.

Won't this luck element annoy the hardcore fans?
We definitely have an adjustment on the game to turn that stuff off so if somebody wants to play just arena combat they can. But I think if we were to stay the same people would think 'okay, been there done that', there's nothing new to try out. That's the dangerous path to take.

Favourite *Mortal Kombat* character and fatality?
I definitely play Scorpion the most and my favourite fatality in the whole game is probably Sub Zero's spine rip from the first game. That was inspired by *Predator*. In the new game Baraca has this one where he slices you at the waist, then cuts off your arms and stabs you in the middle pulling your entire torso away which is pretty good.

It must be fun picking new fatalities?
They're really hard to come up with because you've done like a hundred of them before. We have 30 to 40 guys on the team and any time anyone has an idea for a fatality they write it down and give it to the animators. To come up with 48 unique fatalities sounds easy but there are limitations to the technology. You can't just cut someone's head off and take their brains out, it takes a lot of work to do that. Anybody can think of one but to think of one that can be done and is cool is the difficult thing.

Is there a limit to what you would do in a fatality?
I think for me the limit is doing something that somebody might actually think of doing. I don't think we'd ever do something that someone in real life would do, so instead we keep everything as outrageous as possible. You know you grab their arms, rip them off and keep everything so extreme. So basically anything that is leaning towards reality we kind of steer away from, we're more about the supernatural and the unbelievable.

Finally, why the 'K's?
I don't even know where that started, I think it was with one of the guys on our team when we were trying to name the game. We were going to call it *Dragon Attack*, *Kumitee* and, you know, all these Van Damme type movie names. Someone suggested *Mortal Kombat*, then someone said let's spell it with a 'K' and then all the words started being spelt with K. It got a little out of control. ■

NEWS



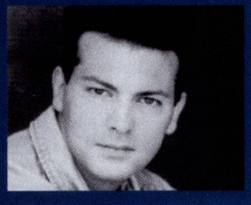
12 THE EARTH WILL MOVE

GTA is back, bigger than life and twice as bad. *San Andreas* is set to re-define the *GTA* series once more, with more cities, more options and more gameplay than ever before.



14 PSP AT E3

Sony finally let us get our hands on the PSP at E3. Publishers were announced (as were final specs), gadgets shown and screens marvelled at – now we just need to play the games...



15 ROUNDUP

Capcom consolidates (and sets up a new studio); Solid Snake to get a new voice (maybe); plus rumours and gossip. See everything.

It's a funny time of year. With E3 (LA's Electronic Entertainment Expo, for those of you who've been living under a rock) falling at the worst possible time in our production schedule, we've managed to bring you the key stories from the event and they're also likely to be the two biggest stories in video gaming (PlayStation or otherwise) this year.

The latest instalment in Rockstar's crime opus, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was shown off-site but tongues were wagging about it all week. Can Rockstar do it again? Based on what we've seen, we'd have to say... oh yes, no doubt. Prepare yourself for the wildest *GTA* ride yet.

Inside the show itself, Sony and Nintendo squared off by unveiling their new handheld machines. Speculation was rampant as to which machine would 'win' but we believe that the consoles – Sony PSP and Nintendo DS – are so different that they'll each have their own unique audience. Still, there's no prize for guessing which one has us the most excited...



Rockstar// GTA: San Andreas

AI SHORTS

SONIC HANDS

SHORT STORY «



SEGA has announced it will be producing a bundle of EyeToy software based on its most famous properties. *SEGA Superstars*, which contains EyeToy-compatible games starring Sonic The Hedgehog, Samba de Amigo and characters from *House Of The Dead* and the *Virtua Fighter* series, should become available before the end of 2004. "It's great to have an opportunity to reach a wider audience," stated Yuji Naka, President of SONICTEAM.

APING THE CLASSICS

SHORT STORY «



Peter Jackson recently expressed a desire to 'do a Wachowski' and take directorial control over videogame adaptations of his next film. The director, currently prepping his remake of *King Kong* to star Tenacious D's Jack Black as journalist Carl Denham opposite Naomi Watt's take on Fay Wray, hopes to ensure the game's quality. Let's hope he does a better job than the Wachowskis, whose *Enter The Matrix* was hardly a stretch for the PS2.

PSP SOFTWARE IS GO

IT'S ALL GO ON THE PSP FRONT

Sony used March's Game Developer's Conference (GDC) in San Jose to highlight the number of developers working on PSP games, with 81 teams already hard at work on the handheld's first run of titles.

This was followed at E3 by the announcement of additional publishers (including holdouts SEGA, Konami and Namco), bringing the total to 99 (24 North American, 31 European, 34 Japanese and 10 South Korean).

In other news, Criterion has ported its RenderWare tools – in their entirety – to PSP, as well as engineering PSP support into its standard Renderware Studio. The software, currently used by many PS2 titles including *Burnout 2*, *Sonic Heroes* and *Vice City*, should ease development for the format, which many companies have already suggested is more user-friendly than the PS2.

Finally, the GDC also saw PSP support from Havok, which will optimise its practically-universal Havok Physics Engine for the system. "PSP is an incredibly exciting platform for Havok," suggested Havok's Chief Technology Officer, Dr. Steven Collins. "Our experience of delivering solutions on existing game consoles gives us confidence that we will soon be providing a really compelling solution for g me title developers on this platform." Though this statement sounds like little more than press release gush, the incorporation of Havok technology is a genuinely exciting prospect for the PlayStation Portable. ■

IT'S SAN ANDREAS!

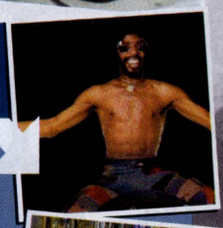
ROCKSTAR CONFIRMS A DATE FOR NEW GTA



Denials, misdirection and multiple-patent subterfuge... it's been a rocky road between the release of *Vice City* and the announcement that *GTA: San Andreas* will indeed be the next instalment to see the light of day, but after a long wait, all manner of stupid rumours and some of the smuggest fan forums to ever grace the internet, everything is finally set in place. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* will be released on 22 November, just three days after its North American release date, and just in time for a boom Christmas for Rockstar Games.

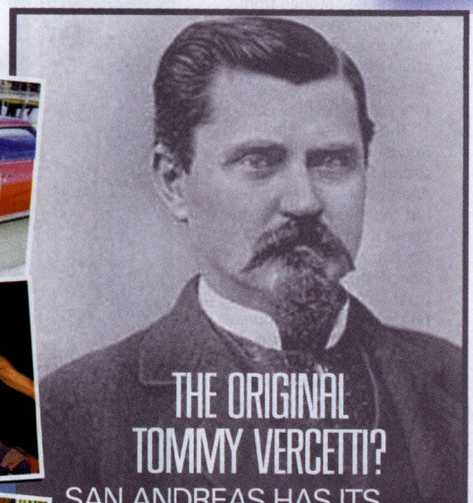
The decision to go with San Andreas as a title and concept will surprise few – as the third city to feature in the original *Grand Theft Auto* on PSone (after Liberty and Vice cities, respectively), it always seemed more likely a choice than many fan-hopefuls (such as Bogotá, Columbia – probably gleaned from a jokey Rockstar promo sticker). In fact, having trawled several *GTA* forums since the announcement, **play™** is yet to find a single poster who will admit to having put their money on a different location. However, indecision is certainly rife as to what gaming content the next *GTA* may encompass, and whether or not it relates to the real San Andreas region of California. ■











THE ORIGINAL TOMMY VERCETTI?

SAN ANDREAS HAS ITS OWN CRIMINAL HISTORY

Between 1875 and 1883, the town of San Andreas was home to its very own career criminal, though unlike the protagonists of the *GTA* series, he never fired a gun and was respected as a gentleman despite his penchant for repeatedly holding up stagecoaches in and around Stockton, CA. Charles E Bolton, notoriously known as 'Black Bart', wore a flour sack as a mask and would leave whimsical poems at the scene of each roadside siege. He was caught in 1883 when a handkerchief left at the scene of one hold-up was traced back to an LA laundry house, only for Bart to happen into the laundry at the exact same moment as Stockton's investigating sheriff. ■

SCENE OF THE CRIME

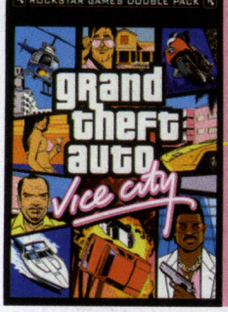
The *GTA* series has never been afraid to commit itself to a specific concept or historical time period – both *GTA: London* and *Vice City* confined themselves to a specific time frame in order to lampoon the zeitgeist and fashions of the era. San Andreas is not a city... it's a state. A fictionalised version of California, no less. The gameplay area comprises three cities and all points in between. That's right, three cities: Los Santos (Los Angeles), San Fierro (San Francisco) and Las Venturas (Las Vegas). Each city is as big as Vice City and when you include the countryside in between the urban centres, the game is somewhere between four and six times the size of its predecessor.

Each city has its own flavour, in terms of geography, inhabitants and gameplay. San Francisco/San Fierro is famous for its hills, for example so we can expect lots of driving missions there. We'll also be seeing a more fully-realised system for buying real estate and perhaps even managing your gang's turf.

Then there's the countryside. We've never had mountains in GTA before... but we do now. Driving from one city to another is an experience we can't wait to sink our teeth into. And we just know the Rockstar crew will have some interesting surprises for us in the great outdoors. The hills are alive, didn't you know? ■

AUTO ERRATIC

HOW DID WE GET HERE FROM VICE CITY? IT'S BEEN A BUMPY RIDE...



NOV 2002
GTA: Vice City is released to a rapturous reception, going on to become a major best-seller.

MARCH 2003
GTA: Sin City supersedes San Andreas for many as the most likely next instalment, based on a talk radio soundbite heard in *Vice City*. Meanwhile, other fans hear a reference to Carcer city on *GTAIII*'s Lips 106 radio station and assume this will be the next title.

MAY 2003
Forums suggest *San Andreas* will be set in Thirties Chicago. Other titles now suggested include the classy *GTA: Gang Bang*. Other rumours suggest the technology needed for the next *GTA* is so great it will not appear until PlayStation3.

NOV 2003
Rapper 50 Cent is said to be hard at work recording some original soundtrack material for the next *GTA*.

FEB 2003
The name 'San Andreas' is first thrown around as a title, after Rockstar craftily copyrights the website name. Net-heads begin to 'confirm' scoops for new locations, including Bogotá, Cuba and, erm, Belfast.

APRIL 2003
'News' regarding 'GTA5' claims it will feature rocket-firing and bullet-proofing upgrades for cars.

JULY 2003
Apparently, news surfaces from Rockstar that the next *GTA* will be online. Funny how they've never confirmed it since...

SEP 2003
New info corroborates the theory that the next *GTA* will be set 'in the near future', giving license to every thirteen-year-old's idea of what a future car would look like.

DEC 2003
Rockstar Games licenses several possible titles, including *San Andreas*, *Bogotá* and *Sin City*.

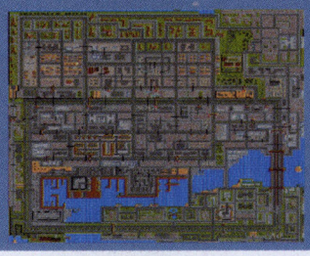
PERFECT TO A FAULT

SAN ANDREAS, CALIFORNIA: A ROCKIN' PLACE TO LIVE

Aside from the fact it apparently never rains there and has one of the coolest reputations on earth, it's not all plain sailing in California. For a start, they've got Mr Schwarzenegger for a governor and the region is strangle-held by a daunting amount of debt. And then, of course, there's the region's propensity for large-scale earthquakes.

Extending vertically along the west coast of America, the San Andreas fault is the most famous fault line on the planet, and in 1988 was given a 20% chance of producing a massive earthquake by the year 2028 by USGS (the United State Geological Survey). As it stands, the last sizable quake to hit the fault occurred in 1966, though minor tremors of varying magnitude are recorded constantly.

This feature of the real San Andreas area naturally leads to dreams of a quake-riddled gaming environment, possibly with shifting geography and 'trigger' areas which become closed off or opened up after an in-game tremor. However, Rockstar will not be pressed on the issue yet, though more geological information of the virtual kind is expected during E3 in May. ■



PERPETRATOR

In the tradition of the *Grand Theft Auto* series, you'll be playing as a criminal. This time, however, you're not just a professional thug. Carl Johnson, your alter ego, escaped the San Andreas region to make a new life for himself. Now it's the early 90s and Carl has to go home. His mother has been murdered and his family is falling apart. Even his childhood friends are on a collision course with disaster.

Despite his noble intentions, things go from bad to worse for Carl. Framed for murder by a couple of corrupt cops, Carl is forced to fight. To save his family. To save his friends. To save himself. And if, along the way, he has to deal with corrupt copy and take control of the streets... then so be it.

All well and good. Just remember, as Carl Johnson, you'll need to look after yourself. You'll need to eat, for example, but if you don't also hit the gym you'll get fat which will reduce your stamina, causing you trouble in on-foot missions. It'll also influence the reactions of those around you – after all, a chubby gangster isn't nearly as imposing as a buff mother*ucker.

MODUS OPERANDI

This is where things get really interesting. All NPCs in the game have their own 'brain' and will react intelligently to your actions. The game will also have a dynamic difficulty system, helping avoid situations where you get stuck on a mission and can't advance. You'll also be able to recruit a gang and command your criminal empire. Four-man drive-by, anyone?

Money is always important, so between missions you'll be able to indulge in a little friendly break-and-enter. Indeed, Rockstar have been hard at work to blur the distinction between free-roaming and mission-based play, with the side missions giving you opportunities to gain new skills and free-roaming play the opportunity (as always) to add to your coffers.

In addition to cars, *San Andreas* will also introduce bicycles. We know of one industry veteran who's already salivating at the chance to bust out some big BMX moves on the hills of San Fierro already. More seriously, bikes can be a handy getaway and reconnaissance vehicle.

Finally (well, not really, but we're running out of space), the combat system has been improved, with the targeting system based on the one we saw in *Manhunt*.

FEB 2004
Rockstar officially confirms *San Andreas* as the next game in the series, *San Andreas* being the third city in the original *GTA*.

MAR 2004
Rockstar announces swimming, two-handed gunplay, bullet time, gambling, rag doll physics and children with splurge guns will all feature in the final game. Probably.

JAN 2004
The Daily Mirror 'announces' that former Happy Mondays frontman and professional drugs-sponge Shaun Ryder will be voicing a character. A rival PS2 mag also 'confirms' the world's foremost solo artist, Eminem, will be slumming it by providing a voice.



grand theft auto San Andreas







PSP UNVEILED

AT LAST, WE GET TO TRY OUT SONY'S NEW BABY



There were two big stories at E3. One was the undercurrent of speculation about Rockstar's latest entry in the *Grand Theft Auto* series, *GTA San Andreas* (see story, pp. 14–15). The other was the upcoming battle for the hearts and minds of mobile gamers ushered in by Sony (PlayStation Portable) and Nintendo (Dual Screen).

Except that the battle might not ever really unfold. The two machines are very different beasts, likely to appeal to two very different audiences.

Nintendo's DS is a GameBoy Advance on steriods, with two screens (one of which is touch-sensitive), a stylus, both wi-fi and a proprietary short-range wireless networking protocol and some impressive looking technical demos. It's a device with massive potential and (possible) broad appeal, but in reality it's unlikely to interest Sony's target audience.

The PSP, on the other hand, is a stylish portable media device. It looks fabulous – more like a glossy black iPod than a game deck – has a very impressive screen and a range of peripherals including a GPS module, telephone, USB keyboard, external battery packs and headsets with and without microphones.

The specs have been finalised at last and it'll be in our hands early next year, with a Christmas 2004 release in Japan and first quarter 2005 for North America and Europe (which includes us).

Getting to actually handle a unit was a definite highlight. It feels good in the hands and the controls were immediately familiar. The real surprise was the quality of the screen. With its 16:9 aspect ratio it's set for widescreen movie-watching but we're concerned about battery life: we suspect the display will suck down a lot of juice. There were a number of great-looking games on show but all were in development, leading to speculation that the PSP cases (which were anchored to their display pods) were actually hooked up to workstations running PSP emulators.

Sony was also touting the number of developers it has already signed up to work on PSP products – nearly 100 companies from all major territories.

So. The stage is set, the battle-lines drawn. What we need to know now is the price. Sony hasn't confirmed anything yet, Sony is well aware that a price point over $500 is likely to be fatal and that the closer to $300 they can get, the better. Nintendo is making similar noises so we're confident of a mighty struggle for our dollars. Both machines look good – but you can only play Wipeout (a perennial favourite here at **play**™ HQ) on PSP... ■





Sony // PS3

DEVELOPMENT HEAVEN

IT'S ALL GO ON THE PSP FRONT

Sony executive Vice President Andrew House used March's Game Developer's Conference (GDC) in San Jose as an opportunity to highlight the number of developers working on PSP games – a staggering 81 coding teams were already hard at work on the handheld's first run of titles, suggesting that there is unlikely to be a shortage of quality software to accompany the console's release.

At E3 a number of additional publishers were announced (including holdouts SEGA, Konami and Namco), bringing the total to 99 (24 North American, 31 European, 34 Japanese and 10 South Korean).

In other news, Criterion has ported its RenderWare tools – in their entirety – to PSP for use with future titles, as well as engineering PSP support into its standard Renderware Studio. The software, which is currently used by many PS2 titles including *Burnout 2*, *Sonic Heroes* and *Vice City*, should ease development for the format, which many companies have already suggested is far more user-friendly than the PS2.

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PLAYER, HAYTER?

RUMOURS OF SNAKE'S DEMISE POSSIBLY NOT EXAGGERATED

Following last month's *Metal Gear* camouflage update, some interesting news has emerged surrounding the prospective casting of Hideo Kojima's next *MGS* instalment. On 26 March, news stories started popping up across the Internet detailing an open casting call, apparently put out for voice performers to fill the open roles in Konami's imminent jungle stealth-'em-up.

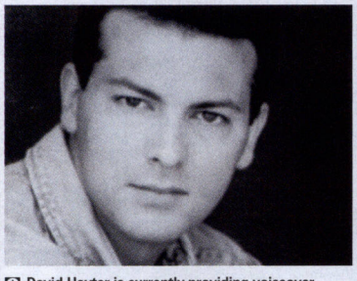
The biggest surprise here? Well, the cast list, which featured over twenty named characters (including such intriguing monikers as 'The Sorrow', 'The End' and 'Major Zero') also put out the call for a voice actor to play Snake himself, suggesting David Hayter will not be returning to lend his gravel-dragging tones to the character. Hayter has previously voiced Solid Snake in both *Metal Gear Solid* titles. However, there are several possible reasons for his non-involvement this time around.

Firstly, *Snake Eater* is set in 1964 and is therefore removed from the pseudo-modern technological influences of *MGS1 & 2* – many Internet rumours have suggested that the 'Snake' of *MGS3* is more likely a forebear of Snake rather than the man himself. Another possibility is that *Snake Eater*'s protagonist is actually Big Boss, the original soldier from whom the Snake line was cloned. Of course, there could be another, altogether more simple answer – that Snake, having not begun his smoking habit in the mid-sixties, merely sounded younger, and Konami is searching for a less grizzled tone to give voice to a younger Snake. Interestingly, the casting sheet also put out a call for Ocelot, suggesting that Patrick Zimmerman will also not be returning to his familiar character, while current internet speculation suggests Hayter might well be busy writing Alan Moore's *Watchmen* for the big screen.

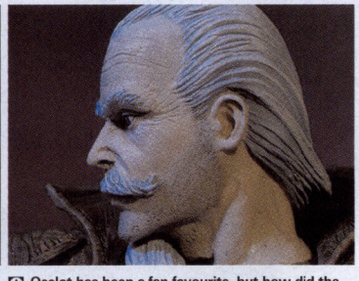
Whatever the answer may be, Konami has so far declined to dignify the press release with a response, stressing that "Konami policy is we don't comment on rumour".Not very helpful – but we'll keep y ou posted. ■



Will a *Metal Gear* title be the same without Snake's dulcit brand of gutteral grunt?



David Hayter is currently providing voiceover duties for Eidos's *Shellshock: "Nam '67.*



Ocelot has been a fan favourite, but how did the crow-footed cowboy sound in the Sixties?

Capcom // Shinji Mikami

IT'S ALL CLOVER

CAPCOM STALWARTS MOVE TO PASTURES NEW

Last month, when Capcom closed several of its smaller development houses outside home city Osaka, raised voices could be heard throughout the industry, telling stories of a once great company in dire need of rejuvenation. But it seems these wicked tongues spat their venom a little prematurely, as it transpired that Capcom's plans were altogether less desperate than mere loss consolidation, and that the development favourite was about to open a brand new independent game studio.

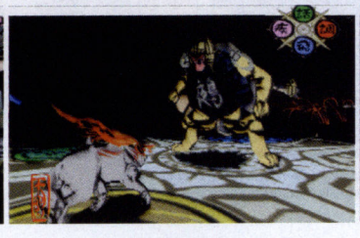
To be headed up by Atsushi 'Viewtiful Joe' Inaba, Clover Studio will retain Capcom as a financial parent but will function as a wholly independent company, its goal being to allow itself the freedom to explore new gaming avenues and develop original game concepts. Joining Inabi at Clover will be *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami and Hideki Kamiya, director of *Devil May Cry*, making Clover a development dream team with an enviable pedigree.

Clover's first two titles will be PlayStation2 conversions of the Gamecube's scrolling platform beat-'em-up *Viewtiful Joe*, and its imaginatively entitled sequel, *Viewtiful Joe 2*. Ironically, Capcom announced that *Devil May Cry*'s Dante will be playable as an extra character in the PS2 version of *Viewtiful Joe*, while *VJ2* will enable gamers to take on the role of Sylvia, elevated from her role of 'girl in distress' in *Viewtiful Joe*.

The third title announced by Clover is called *Okami* (which means 'wolf'), and draws heavily from Japanese spirituality (see screen grabs below). Placing the player in the role of Shinto sun goddess Ameratsu (in the form of a white wolf, no less), the player must destroy a darkness-plagued world of monsters in order to restore light and colour – it's an interpretation of a classic Japanese folk tale, in which Ameratsu restores light to the land by emerging from self-imposed exile in a cave. In keeping with the rural theme, the visual style of the game is cel-shaded and reminiscent of traditional Japanese ink art, animé and Sony's *Mojibribon*.

Quite how the creation of Clover Studio will affect the workforce left back at Capcom remains to be seen, but it is unlikely either developer will remain silent about their future plans for too much longer. ■







Rumours // Some nonsense

RUMOUR CONTROL

NO LESS THAN 50% GENUINE: SEMI-GUARANTEED!

No sooner had Eidos announced its decision to purchase Danish hit(*man*)-makers IO Interactive, than the publishing king announced it is already developing a follow-up to the not-yet-released *Hitman Contracts*, with ensuing sequels to appear the same time every year until the world stops moving. In other Eidos related whispers, the company has expressed satisfaction with the way Lara is progressing under the programming control of Crystal Dynamics, with unofficial rumours suggesting that Ion Storm's big man Warren Spector has been 'loaned' to the new Croft manor to help with the number one lady of PlayStation's big new comeback.

We've also seen a couple of possible fanboy-wish-list items receiving widespread repetiton, relating to the *Metal Gear Solid* series. The first suggested that Nintendo's own Mr *Mario*, Shigeru Miyamoto, will be joining forces with Hideo "Snaaaaaaaaaake!" Kojima to design the follow up to *Snake Eater*, following a solid working relationship forged during the development of *The Twin Snakes* on GameCube. Another (albeit less likely) tattling suggested that picture-phone facilities will be incorporated into the next *MGS* title, meaning that photo snaps taken on your phone in the real world can be used to camouflage your playable character in the game!

Meanwhile, Sony's was a bit quiet last month, probably in preparation for a gargantuan series of product unveilings around E3. One report that managed to filter out of Sony HQ, however, saw the company in talks with a "prominent-yet-unnamed internet service provider" in an attempt to get PS3 network gaming organised before the machine has even hit the shelves and to ensure downloadable content for the service will be universally available to all. If all goes to plan, Sony should have the premier online service for the next generation of videogame consoles.

Finally, suggestions have been filtering through that Square Enix's opening PSP gambit will either be some sort of Final Fantasy compilation (with several early FF adventures crammed onto a single UMD for your retro-gaming pleasure), or – even better – a couple of separate new FF titles, one of which may even link to FFXII on PS2. Of course, these last rumours were reported by a laughably unreliable source, but considering that the original stories stem from Japan, there's at least a glimmer of hope.

Until next month...

play™ NETWORK

A NEW MONTHLY FEATURE DEVOTED TO GETTING THE MOST OUT OF BROADBAND GAMING ON YOUR PS2

BATTLEFIELD: MODERN COMBAT

EA MAKES WAR JUST FOR FUN

Following the enormous success of PC titles *Battlefield 1942* and *Battlefield Vietnam*, EA will be bringing its unique brand of online combat to PS2 gamers with *Battlefield: Modern Combat*, which takes the original gameplay elements from its PC counterparts and drops them from a chopper into a contemporary urban setting.

And what gameplay elements they are. Choosing from a variety of military roles that practically encompass every job in the armed services – including engineer, sniper, rifleman and vehicle driver – it is your job to support the other players on your team in an ongoing battle. Of course, there's an element of videogame pseudo-realism here, so if an essential comrade falls you'll be forced to swap your role for his in order to complete his goal and therefore aid your team's ultimate progression. It's a move away from the clutch of current online titles that still manage to make you feel like you're playing on your own, despite being part of a twenty-strong team.

Swedish developer Digital Illusions has included three environments to raze to the ground and fill with enemy corpses – United States, China, and somewhere called 'the newly formed Middle East coalition' (obviously to liken the campaign to any real *current* war would be simply immoral, while it would apparently be fine to invade the Middle East if they weren't hampered by all that pesky civil unrest) – and each location will be filled with the latest war technology, from tanks to choppers to heavy weaponry. Additionally, Network Play's servers will be chugging just thinking about the prospect of 24 players battling simultaneously with constant ranking updates, but dammit if EA isn't going to just go ahead and enable such a madman's design when the game is released in late 2004. ■



At this stage the visuals aren't exactly wowing us, but the potential for a good laugh in spite of this remains.



Looks like EA is spending its bucks big-time on this one. The vehicle combat should offer a welcome dimension to the warfare.

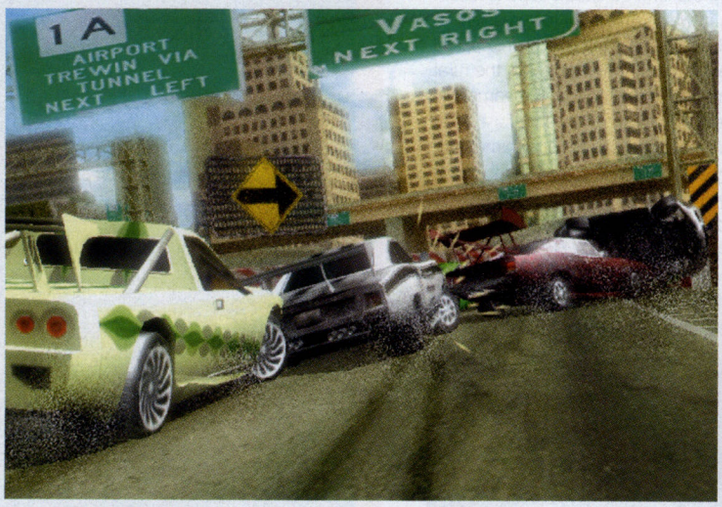


The game proposes to enable up to 24 players online, which should lead to a helluvalot of chaotic fun.

Eidos // Crash 'n' Burn

CRASH 'N' BURN

CLIMAX GOES FOR THE BURNOUT CROWN



The early press shots hold up well to the recently released *Burnout 3* screens. This could turn into quite a close battle.

Just before **play**™ went to press, Eidos announced it will bring Climax's new *Burnout*-with-bells-on to the PS2 network, and we just couldn't wait to show you these exclusive, pre-E3 screenshots.

Players choose a car, before customising it inside and out, adding extra components, some go-faster stripes and a phat spoiler on the back if you so desire. Then the racing begins – supercharged and nitrous-fuelled, spread across Miami, LA, San Francisco and New York, with sixteen controllable vehicles taking part in each race. *Crash 'n' Burn*'s dual objectives are pretty simple: win the race, and ram every other car right off the road.

Eidos has confirmed a variety of game modes, including 'Last Man Standing' (the last car left with four wheels wins) and 'Bomb Tag' where every course is fitted with multiple-angled, player-controlled camera set-ups. If these renders are any mark of the quality we should expect from *Crash 'n' Burn*, then it should definitely give *Burnout 3* a run for its money when it's released later this year. ■



Crash 'n' Burn isn't just a cool name, it actually features burning crashes.

NETWORK GAMES LIST

NOT SURE WHICH GAMES ARE COMPATIBLE ONLINE? READ THIS FIRST...

SOCOM: US NAVY SEALS — SONY
What you get: 12 new online multiplayer maps, lobby, chat rooms, ladder ranking, clan support.

TWISTED METAL: BLACK ONLINE — SONY
What you get: Up to eight-player simultaneous network play.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4 — ACTIVISION
What you get: Up to eight players can compete in the online-exclusive Goal Attack and Capture The Flag modes.

AMPLITUDE — SONY
What you get: Challenge gamers online in Multiplayer and Remix modes. Also: chat-enabled, ladder ranking and a 'remix repository' database.

EVERQUEST ONLINE — SONY
What you get: Upto 8000 players can adventure online at any one time.

MY STREET — SONY
What you get: Four-player simultaneous network play, with seven game modes to choose from.

MIDNIGHT CLUB II — ROCKSTAR
What you get: Simultaneous network racing for up to eight players.

HARDWARE: ONLINE ARENAS — SONY
What you get: Regular, big-prize competitions online, record scores, rankings and multiplayer network play.

DD ARENAS — SONY
What you get: Up to 16 players can compete in network demolition racing.

TRIBES ARIEL ASSAULT — SIERRA
What you get: Four exclusive vehicles, and network combat for up to 16 players.

FIRE WARRIOR — THQ
What you get: Online Network play.

MADDEN 2004 — EA
What you get: Messaging, voice-chat, and online multiplayer with anti-plug-pulling fail-safes to increase fair play.

FIFA FOOTBALL 2004 — EA
What you get: Rankings, Multiplayer, messaging, voice-chat and downloadable content.

MOH: RISING SUN — EA
What you get: 10 new multiplayer maps, up to eight-player simultaneous play, voice chat.

NFS: UNDERGROUND — EA
What you get: Online racing and ranking tables.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND — ACTIVISION
What you get: Upload your own face onto your character, plus multiplayer options and game modes.

NHL 2004 — EA
What you get: Online match-play and rankings.

XIII — UBISOFT
Upto eight-player deathmatch.

RAINBOW SIX 3 — UBISOFT
Online co-op and deathmatch content.

SOCOM II: US NAVY SEALS — SONY
More of the same from Sony – this will be hitting a shelf near you very soon.

COMING SOON

JUICED — ACCLAIM
Head-to-head and team racing modes.

MONSTER HUNTER — SONY
Up to four-player simultaneous network play with Multi-match facilities.

RATCHET & CLANK 3
Eight-player online deathmatch mode.

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW — UBISOFT
Downloadable content, plus the mother of all multiplayer games.

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN — SCEE
Online Deathmatch options.

ONLINE REVIEWS



CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH

Producer: UBISOFT | Developer: SNOWBLIND | Players 2-4 | Reviewed: 114 | Score: 86%

Okay, so *Champions Of Norrath* is little more than a glossy, modern *Gauntlet* update, right? Well, yes. But that's not to say that it falls short of satisfaction in the same way as just about every other modern update. No sir – if anything, *Norrath* comes into its own online. Imagine a split-screen *Gauntlet*, if you will, where it is possible to leave your party and venture off alone, rather than all four of you being restricted to the same screen tile. The level of freedom offered, and the degree of spontaneity this encourages in the gameplay, really highlights the strengths of Snowblind's title and allows the game to become something more than the hammer-the-fire-button-forever hijinx of its now legendary predecessor.

It is also possible to communicate using a USB headset, meaning strategies can be agreed upon from opposite ends of the playing arena before any action is undertaken. And at what point did *Gauntlet* allow you to do this? Consider too, the fact that the scope for character development has come a long way since *Gauntlet*, and that *Norrath*'s virtues enable you to add 'customizable characters'. Snowblind has included a feature which allows you to take your one-player character and weapons online and barter with them, allowing for some varied encounters in the randomised environments.

To be honest, *Norrath* still has its limitations, and very few gamers will fall in love with it as they would perhaps a narrative-led adventure or RPG game, but online, *Champions Of Norrath* shows itself to be satisfying in a different way – it's just simply well programmed, good-looking and immense fun. ■

SCORE: ★★★★★







RAINBOW SIX 3

Producer: UBISOFT | Developer: IN-HOUSE | Players 2-6 | Reviewed: 3 | Score: 85%

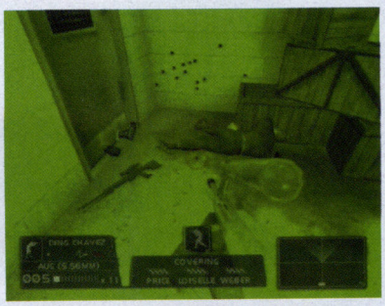
At the risk of sounding like a tagline to a *Jason Vs Freddy VII: Hallowe'en 38*: now there is a new kind of fear. The difference being, of course, that this fear won't be found on the bottom shelf of Blockbuster but in fact online with a PS2 and a copy of *Rainbow Six 3*.

The nature of the main game encourages a calculated approach to burning lead into other people's skulls and the gameplay as a whole makes the transition to network play a smooth one. So smooth, in fact, that for the most part you'll be applying the same tactical wizardry/calamity to the online game as you were in the loner-mode, only this time with a generous portion of atmosphere pasted on.

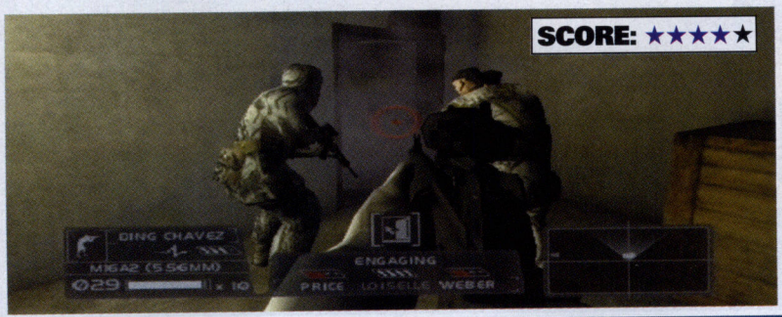
It is here where *RS3* online really comes into its own. The feeling of sneaking around the prison level with information coming in that you are the last member of your squad left and the sound of gunfire getting louder and louder is simply just an experience to behold. And if team-play just isn't your thing there's always the all-against-all Survival mode – you just don't know terror until you've had a few rounds in the Sandstorm level. Hyperbolic? Maybe, but we've yet to find an online cohort who disagrees.

In terms of tension and sheer gameplay immersion, *RS3* online outguns even the mighty *SOCOM II*, though the fact that there are only six allowed in any one round and the levels themselves are a tad too compact is bound to disappoint compared when to *SOCOM*'s expansive maps. However, when considered in relation to a great single-player mode, this is very nearly a game that warrants immediate Broadband installation.■

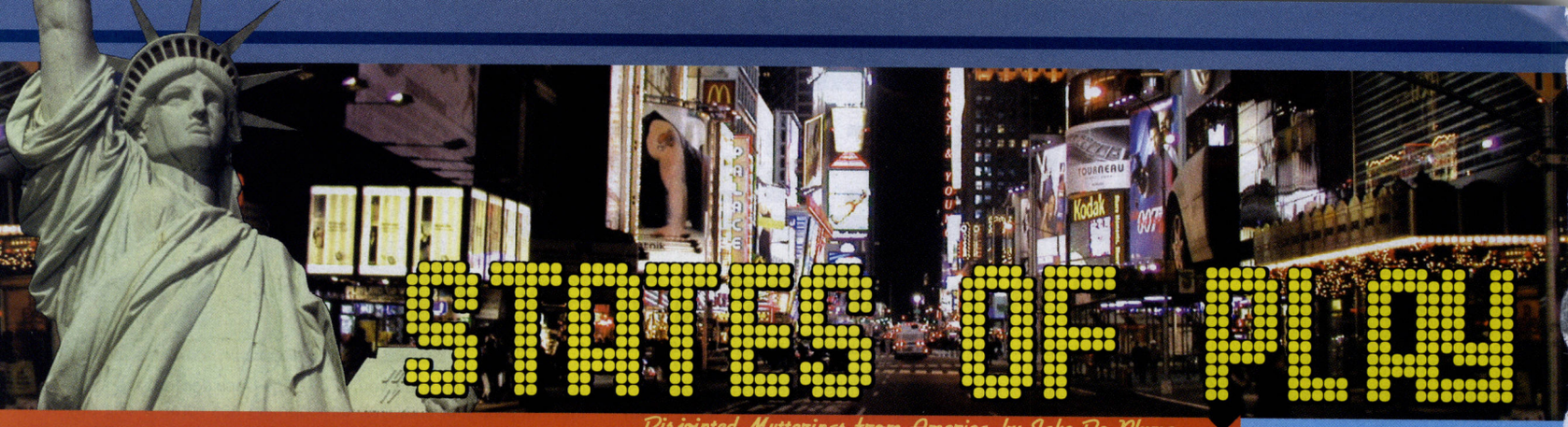




SCORE: ★★★★★







Disjointed Mutterings from America, by Jake De Plume

REALITY REDUX

I've been this country for three years and still counting. They make no secret that they know I'm here. They've been watching me. They tolerate me. I'm not the one they're after.

It's Governor John Kerry, he wants to be the next President Of The United States. Problem is that he committed atrocities during his service in Vietnam. Not all of the five point one million people who died were combatants and Kerry can claim a few. Y'see. Kerry knew what he did was wrong, and returned to the US to protest against it as part of Vietnam Veterans Against War. Now he wants to be President because he's killed all sorts of people and knows it's wrong, while George W Bush hasn't personally killed anybody but nonetheless knows it's right.

Now there's a new group: Vietnam Veterans Against John Kerry. They think he's a communist for not wanting to kill communists. He's unpatriotic. He's a red. Being a foreigher in the US means various things. You probably don't mind that your teeth aren't as regimented as a military cemetery, and you have no hang-ups concerning Vietnam.

Drinking a pint of Sam Adams Ale, enjoying a very spicy and herbal aroma balanced by a malty, sweet finish when she said to me, "I only give to veterans, or people who are obviously disabled." She was talking about her policy for street tipping.

When I first came to New York the first thing to hit me was the smell, quickly followed by a black guy who insisted that he was The Man to clean my trainers. He had all his limbs, and wasn't displaying any medals. Maybe I shouldn't have handed him a dollar to leave me alone? Hindsight is a wonderful thing.



The brutally 'realistic' *Shellshock: Nam '67* will be released the same year a Vietnam vet runs for president. As John Rambo once mumbled, "It's never over". Incidentally, can you guess which of these guys hasn't been to 'Nam?

I asked her, "Why veterans and disabled?" I wasn't drunk, but certainly relaxed to the point when my jaw could dislocate to accommodate my entire left foot. To calm down I'd have to smoke, and to smoke I'd have to stand outside the bar. A perfect location if you want at least four homeless types to ask for a cigarette.

"They had a really hard time, it wasn't their fault."

So they're both victims of accidents?

This is the day the word has witnessed images of American troops mishandling Iraqi prisoners in Bagdahd's Abu Ghraib prison. One shows a prisoner atop a box, his arms stretched out in a Jesus Christ pose and a black bag on his head. Electric wires are attached to his arms, legs and genitals. Should his bare feet touch the floor, he'd be grounded and a lot warmer, possibly deader. During the Vietnam War, film crews were allowed to pan across rows of coffins as they arrived back in the States, the cold eyes of a nation's grief. Now they won't be seen because George doesn't want to upset the families of the dead. He doesn't like it when Internet sites begin to glow with smuggled-out digital pictures of wooden boxes covered in the stars and stripes. Technology has moved on, it enables you to take an image and place it online for all to bear witness, and it will soon enable you to kill Iraqis and Viet Cong, again. *Conflict: Desert Storm II* is already with us, *Conflict: Vietnam* is on its way. In this state there is no statute of limitation for murder, but it only takes twenty nine years for a country to turn their most disastrous military conflict into formalised entertainment.

I sat back in my chair at my iMac, content with the weight and importance of that last sentence, then Sylvester Stallone came to me, riding on horseback, his body glowing from fighting with the Tailiban in *Rambo III*. He said to me, "Dude, chill out. Making light of a conflict after the fact is as natural a part of conflict as grieving."

Damn it if the Italian Stallion didn't have a point. I'd like to finish by personally thanking the makers of *Conflict: Vietnam* (Pivotal – a British Developer) and *Shellshock: Nam '67* (Guerrilla – Dutch) for helping America deal with its past. Cheers. Oh, and anyone who says the Americans can't make decent beer is a fool.



John Rambo took a step back and looked at what was left of Afghanistan. A job well done.



Pivotal's *Conflict* titles would have you believe wars are won through teamwork and looking out for one another.

USA CHARTS

TOP 10 GAMES



01 **NBA BALLERS** MIDWAY

02 **RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK** CAPCOM

03 **SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW** UBISOFT

04 **TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3** UBISOFT

05 **ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005** ACCLAIM

06 **FIGHT NIGHT 2004** EA SPORTS

07 **RISE TO HONOR** SONY

08 **MAFIA** TAKE TWO

09 **JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING** EA GAMES

10 **TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM** UBISOFT

USA RELEASES

OUT NOW, OVER THERE



ONIMUSHA 3 CAPCOM



RED DEAD REVOLVER TAKE TWO

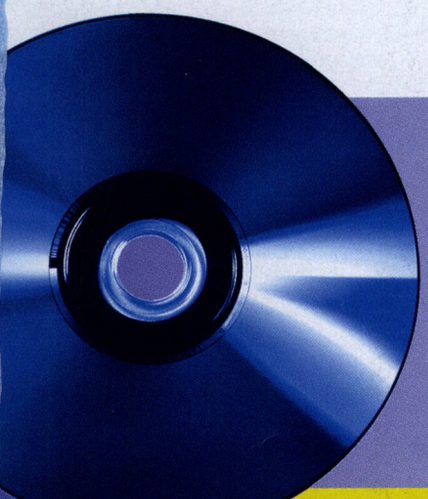
AND THE LUCKY WINNER IS...

Congratulations to Thomas Oliver of Kenthurst, NSW. Thomas is the winner of our exclusive Ghosthunter jacket giveaway. His favourite PlayStation games are *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Jak & Daxter* and (of course) *Ghosthunter*.

Now all he needs to look as cool as Lazarus Jones is a big gun... and some ghosts to fight...







COVER CD GUIDE

PLAYABLE CHEATS

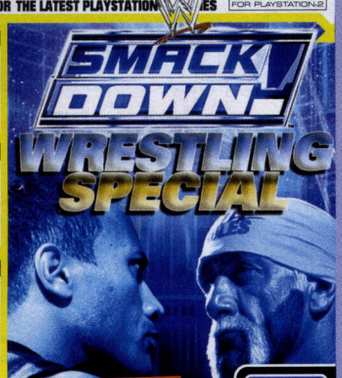
VOL.4 CHEAT CODES FOR THE LATEST PLAYSTATION GAMES FOR PLAYSTATION 2







PLUS CODES FOR ALL THESE GAMES...
I-NINJA
MAXIMO 2
GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II



PLAYABLE CHEATS FOR:
» HERE COMES THE PAIN
» JUST BRING IT
» SHUT YOUR MOUTH

POWERED BY AR ACTION MAX "THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL CHEATS SYSTEM"

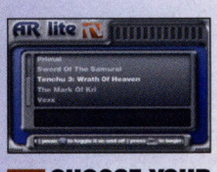
PLUS DOWNLOADABLE GAME SAVES
MAFIA, GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY, I-NINJA AND BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

HOW TO USE YOUR CHEATS CD



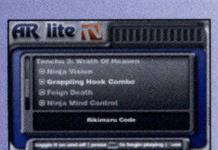
01 GET DISC OUT OF THE BOX

And insert it into your PS2. Close the drawer. Choose your language by flag.



02 CHOOSE YOUR GAME

Use your D-pad to highlight the game you want to cheat on and press ⊗.



03 CHOOSE YOUR CHEAT

Activate the cheat you want to use by pressing ⊗.



04 SWAP THE DISC FOR YOUR GAME

Make sure you don't reset your PS2; your game will now load up, cheats and all.

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マチセ シハキ

jap's eye reviews

THE GAMES WE MAY NEVER SEE...



ニニマキ カヤノカニト

THIS PART IS ABOUT DRAGON QUEST TOO



While he was smoking a cigarette and watching the Giants against the Tigers on TV, I asked my girlfriend's dad, "8,100 yen, for a game? That's a lot. That's too much." He shrugged his shoulders. "What are you going to do? It's *Dragon Quest*." He said it like you'd say, "What are you going to do? It's an angioplasty." Simply put, it was something he needed.

This is what Japanese business has dissolved into. Yes, I know that PS2s are expensive to manufacture, and that Sony eats a small plate of Fukuzawa Salad (Fukuzawa Yukichi, see, is the Meiji-era philosopher pictured on the 10000-yen bill, and... never mind) every time they sell a PS2. I know they only make money from games. Still. It burns me to see this. (It also burns me to see that *Ninja Gaiden* for Xbox is 9700 yen, though if you look at my next paragraphs, it's pretty apparent why.)

"The game's expensive because it's a guaranteed seller," my girlfriend's dad said. "Sony needs to prepare for the big losses they're going to incur when *Dragon Quest VIII* is released and everyone buys a PS2. Damned game might be 10000 yen. All hell is going to break loose. This city's going to be turned upside-down."

He has a really grim way of looking at things. Then again, he should know – he's the retired businessman, not me. Then again, I saw the Akihabara *Dragon Quest VII* riots with my own eyes. Then again, so did he. He, however, has preordered *VIII*. I will walk to Akihabara on that day, maybe, to see if anyone on a moped tries to hit me with a lead pipe as I leave my favorite Sofmap. Interesting times ahead over here. ■

NB: Dictionary definition of the word 'angioplasty':

The surgical repair of a blood vessel, either by inserting a balloon-tipped catheter to unblock it, or by reconstructing or replacing part of the vessel.
Source: dictionary.com



キトカスラ

KATAMARI DAMASHI

(AVAILABLE NOW)

As this is a magazine for Australians, and you people are... kind of Australian, many of you will be into music of the wacky, funky, tripped-out, bossa nova techno variety. Am I right or am I right? Well, *Katamari Damashi* is full of that kind of music, and many of you have probably already pirated the ever-loving hell out of its soundtrack. I write in here to report that the gameplay is, for the most part, mildly interesting: using two analog sticks, you move around a little alien creature who psychically controls a floating ball which picks up small things until it reaches a certain size, when it then starts picking up big things. It feels very, very floaty – though this is without a doubt the intention of the design; there's some comfort in the floatiness – some great comfort even. It's the same satisfaction you get when you start picking up cats and they meow. In the end, though, it's really kind of tedious. In a mostly good way. And it has that good music. This game is the kind of 'WACKY JAPANESE GAME' that Western gamers will look at and covet to the point of leaving Namco no choice about releasing it in the West. ■



イスクノキトカスラ

GUNBIRD 1 & 2 ATLUS

(AVAILABLE NOW)



If you really, honestly believe in the words that I say, listen here – you should get *Gunbird 1 & 2*. It's the two *Gunbird* games included on one DVD. *Gunbird* is a top-down shooting game where your character is a flying person, not a space ship. Unlike Ikaruga or Radian Silvergun, the game is not about patterns and mastery of unique gameplay concepts. It's about flying up and shooting everything. It's what we in the business call a 'straight-ahead shooter'. It doesn't lie to you. It doesn't hurt you. It's full of all the really cute characters you Westerners seem to enjoy, and everything is boldly animated. ■



キトカウエ

DRAGON QUEST V SQUARE-ENIX

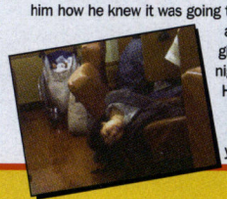
(AVAILABLE NOW)

YES, YES, YES, I KNOW I talk about *Dragon Quest* all the time. I can't help it, though. It's what people in Japan talk about, if they talk about videogames. I'm going to give it a little review here though, all formal-like. Well, at least, I'll try. Where do I begin? *Dragon Quest V* was the first game of the series to appear on Super Famicom. *Dragon Quest IV* had left most hardcore players a little upset at its dilution of the third title's difficulty. The second game, of course, was bastardly hard. The third was a little easier – though it let you choose character classes. The fourth stuck you with one party of adventurers. The fifth combined a story with deep customizability, and it is, to this day, a great game for it. Though its graphics and music quality originally paled in comparison to *Final Fantasy IV* (and then *Dragon Quest VI*) and the game was dismissed by some as a mere 'transition' piece. None of this is an issue now. With a much-deserved symphonic musical score and butter-smooth graphics, this story of a young boy growing into a hero in the footsteps of his exiled-king father has jumped up and shown many Japanese businessmen, these past few weeks, that the game they remembered from their high school or college years wasn't just a fad after all. ■

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THIS GIRL SLEEPS ALL NIGHT, THE SLEEP OF THE DEAD, IN AN INTERNET CAFE

I was trapped in the Ikebukuro Manga Hiroba Manga and Internet Café with Tim Rogers a few weeks back, and when he was coming back from getting a Coca-Cola, he showed me this picture. Some girl had fallen asleep in her chair, with her hand touching the floor, in front of a Yahoo! Auctions page for an auction that was going to end in an hour. I asked him how he knew it was going to end in an hour. He said, "Well, I went up and had a look at the screen." I asked him why he might walk up behind a girl who's asleep in a dark internet café in the middle of the night, and he told me, "I was thinking of touching her neck." He went on to explain that the skin looked very soft. "I also thought it would have, you know, woken her up in time to bid on the auction." I can spot the hole in his logic – can you? For a novelist, he lacks proper lying skills sometimes.



LOST IN TRANSLATION OPENS IN JAPAN AND NO ONE NOTICES

Sofia Coppolla's Oscar-nominated *Lost In Translation* opened in Tokyo last week, on the same day as *Kill Bill Volume 2* and *Casshern*. However, I... don't think it's doing too well. It's only open on one theater, that being one in Ginza. I've seen the movie on DVD thanks to an American friend with an American PS2 (thanks, Chuck), and it didn't wow me, maybe because I see the Hachiko Square crossing in Shibuya just about every day. Japanese people don't feel any wonder when they cross that street. They're usually just trying to get to Starbucks. I must say I liked the movie's ending very much, however. On a related note – not two days before the movie's premiere, Suntory Whiskey changed their decades-old bottle design, so that it now looks nothing like the bottle prominently featured in the movie. Coincidental, odd, strange – or just plain weird?



MOVIE REVIEW: CASSHERN

You know, for all the attention this movie is getting on American websites that love screaming about movies, I don't think I've met a single Japanese person who's seen it. I haven't even seen it myself. It just came out last week. The previews and promotional still photos look really, really good. Hell – that's an understatement. They look deep and rich to the point of being pretty damned scary. The story is based on an old Japanese anime called *Casshern: Robot Hunter*. It's about the future, when robots have taken over the earth's crime. Casshern is a guy who kills robots. A movie of this could be really, really good. I looked everywhere for reviews, and I just didn't see them. I should just go see the movie, myself. Maybe.

ヂトカスラ

REGULAR REPORTS ABOUT HAPPENING EVENTS IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN FROM PLAY'S JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT, BT AMAZAWA

JAP CHARTS

PS2 TOP 10 GAMES



1. ONIMUSHA 3 — CAPCOM
2. SENGOKU MUSOU — KOEI
3. WINNING ELEVEN 7 INTERNATIONAL — KONAMI
4. GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX — SONY
5. SD GUNDAM G GENERATION SEED — BANDAI
6. GUNGRAVE OVERDOSE — SEGA
7. KAIDO BATTLE 2: CHAIN REACTION — GANKI
8. FINAL FANTASY X-2 INTERNATIONAL + LAST MISSION — SQUARE ENIX
9. SHADOW HEARTS II — ARUZE
10. DBZ 2 — BANDAI

JAP CHARTS

MOST WANTED GAMES



KINGDOM HEARTS 2
SQUARE-ENIX

Kingdom Hearts 2 is Square's follow-up to *Kingdom Hearts*, a game which tried to fill the gap left by its absent collision detection with Disney characters meeting *Final Fantasy* characters. The second installment will sell to a million Japanese people who will then probably never play it.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
CAPCOM

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City is an interesting entry so high in the most-wanted charts. I guess the Japanese really did like *Grand Theft Auto III*.







THE BIG STORY EXCLUSIVE

THIS COLUMN IS ABOUT DRAGON QUEST AGAIN

Yes, this column is going to be about *Dragon Quest* again. This is not to suggest a lack of creativity on my part but because *Dragon Quest* is a great thing to talk about. It seems to be all that gamers will ever talk about in Japan. (Note: Japanese gamers, on average, don't talk about games that much.)

If you've been following this column for the past couple of months (and if you haven't been, that's just sad) you'll know that my girlfriend's father bought a PlayStation2 in anticipation of *Dragon Quest VIII*, because he wanted to avoid the hassle of buying the system later. You'll also know that I wrote about DVDs being too expensive in this country, and about how the majority of people still don't own DVD players. Well, now I'm going to make some kind of continuity, when I say that the *Dragon Quest V* remake for PS2 is 8100 yen.

That's, like, $105 pounds. That may not seem like much money for a game. But the typical game in Japan is 5000 yen ($65). Sometimes a special edition will set you back 6,900, and some of these recent games (see last month's column, about *The Simple Series*!) only cost 2000. *Gunbird 1* & *2*, also released this month, is only 4000. Katamari Damacy is only 3980. *Dragon Quest V* is 8100. 8300, if you get it at Bic Camera. And it doesn't have any 'limited edition' features outside of a 'teaser DVD' with a mere three-minute video of *Dragon Quest VIII* on it. ■

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ALBUM REVIEW: TOO FAST TO LIVE TOO YOUNG TO DIE BY KISHIDAN

Kishidan is a Japanese alternative visual punk/rock band masterminded by Ceronias, whose insistence that every member of the band dress in a uniform that's a mixture of Japanese schoolboy and Chinese red guard and walk on in formation. Even while on vacation this is the one detail I would have told people about when I wanted them to 'get' this band. Now, I don't need to tell you that, because they've released an album that is fiercely appealing without explanation. I'll only say this: Ceronias insists on having a six-man chorus in all of his songs. This is most pointedly evident in track eight, *Night Of The Knights*, when the chorus comes in at a minute and thirty-six seconds, turning the song from crazy metal to crazy metal with an undeniable soul. Also, one member of the band is liner-noted as being Dance and Scream. If you saw the live show, you'd understand, man.



BOOK REVIEW: IN THE MISO SOUP BY RYU MURAKAMI

I never read Ryu Murakami in Japanese because he doesn't interest me. He's a movie director, a former rock-star, and a Renaissance Man of sorts. Still. I find his books too stupidly graphic. I saw **games™**'s Kongetsu columnist Tim Rogers reading this book in English, and he said it was a little gory, though readable, and he loaned it to me. It's about a twenty-year-old Japanese tour guide taking an American around sex clubs. He eventually realizes that this American is a serial killer. He then sees him kill some people and the novel goes on to make comments about Japanese society while incorporating the number 108 in a way that Tim Rogers must have found exciting.

WHAT'S GOING DOWN IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN?

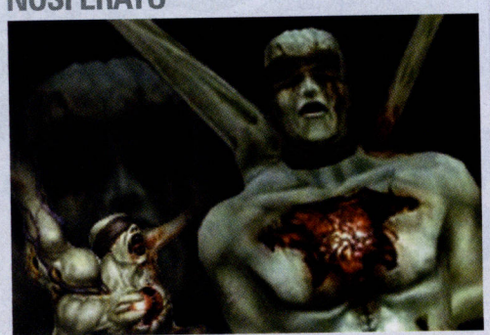
TEN OF THE BEST PS2 BOSS FIGHTS



» You just don't know fear until you've been stuck in a corner with the ruler of Shadowlaw.

WHO ARE THE TEN FINEST BOSSES TO GRACE THE PLAYSTATION2? WE FIND OUT IN WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE ONE PUB CONVERSATION TAKEN WAY TOO LITERALLY

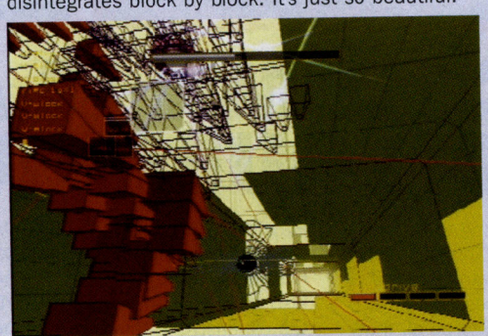
RESIDENT EVIL: CODE VERONICA
NOSFERATU

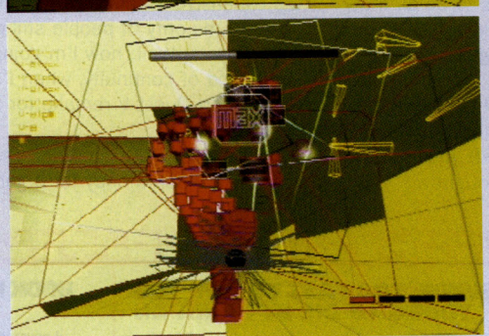


Alexia Ashford may well have had the power and the moves, but it was her twinkle-toed dandy of a brother that really lit up our cans. Shame Steve Burnside manages to pop a cap in his camp derrière really. There is one boon from this apparent demise of this twisted sister. Claire Redfield gets his sniper rifle and gets to take on the Matt Lucas of the evil realm, Nosferatu. His arm whips at you like the disentangled phallus of a blue whale, he creates noxious purple gas attacks, he has a big beating heart in the centre of his chest and you've got the wee man's sniper rifle. Seven bullets and a bit of wandering later and the undead (possibly never alive) bondage beneficiary is ready to be mopped up with a few squirts from the Upgraded Handgun and his place is earned on the mantelpiece next to other rare injection moulded possible action figures. *Resident Evil* AND sniper rifles. God was listening this day.

REZ
THE RUNNING MAN

We could have picked any one of *Rez*'s five bosses – each one is brilliantly designed but this is the one that will stick in the mind FOREVER. Does it have a name? We're not sure – we'll just have to refer to him as 'the running man'. Made up of a hundred blocks, you chase this animated wonder down a series of corridors, twisting and turning (shooting at the soft spot) and watching as his body disintegrates block by block. It's just so beautiful.





PARAPPA THE RAPPER 2
FINAL RAP OFF

"In parenthesis, let me stress the fact clearly,
No matter what the deal I crave for this dearly.
The so-called noodles that you find in spaghetti,
Are sweeter than idols, do damage like machetes!
Without a doubt I got the flow, coming at ya live,
Bring the place alive, every single day I jive,
With the thought comes my direct actions,
Ask my followers, they'll say it's an addiction.
Slurp it, suck it, I know you all like it.
Slurp it, suck it, I know you all like it.
Smell it, taste it, pasta in a market!
Smell it, taste it, fruit in a basket!
Chinese, Italian, Thai or Jamaican,
Mexican, Egyptian, English, Korean,
Anything goes, even Hawaiian!
Anything goes, even Alaskan!"
The greatest rap-based boss fight of all time.



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY
METAL GEAR RAY

Raiden's hair is white to show purity, according to a certain H Kojima. He was designed to be an opposing character to Snake Pliskin. To play from Raiden's point of view is to see exactly how much 'da man' Pliskin is. Solid Snake destroyed Metal Gear Rex, only after a cyborg ninja had already given the mech a decent ragging. You and I would find it hard to destroy an M1 Abrahms main battle tank with an anti-aircraft missile; Raiden, however, found no real problem despatching twelve Metal Gear Rays with one. He even had Solidus Snake on hand to jump on their head and shoot with a machine gun.





So these armoured Rays are now vulnerable to small arms fire and missiles designed to detonate away from a target. If one Raiden with one missile launcher can do all that damage, why didn't they just use an AH-64 Apache gunship? This one makes *Contra*'s list of improbable amalgamations seem quite possible. A classically daft boss fight that manages to destroy an entire game's convoluted narrative. Nice one.

ROCKY
IVAN DRAGO



Communists are villainous enough but when they're beefed up on steroids, kill your best mate, fight for a living and look just like He-Man and The Punisher, you know you're in for a beasting. Ivan 'Whatever he hits, he destroys' Drago is a superb example of what makes *Rocky* such a great use of license and as a result, can deliver a tyrannical right hand lead and one towering, dramatic challenge. Frankly, anyone who can beat Action Jackson to death scares the Capitalism out of us.

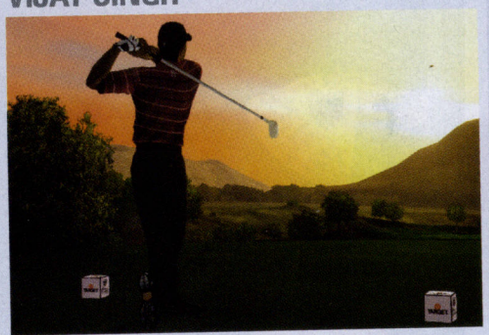
ICO
SHADOW QUEEN.

Most bosses require a step-and-repeat method of attack, whereby you learn a pattern of behaviour exhibited by an enemy and then time your counter-attacks accordingly. *Ico*'s boss is very different – the game requires you to succeed by defensive means, parrying away the queen's 'darkness' attacks in order to get close enough to draw blood. Of course, each time you hit her your sword flies



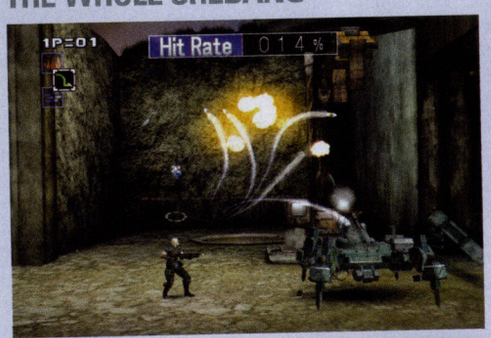
across the room, and you have to manoeuvre the neighbouring pillars so you are protected while unarmed. Genius.

TIGER WOODS 2003
VIJAY SINGH



The typical Vijay Singh shot goes as follows: swing/ duddum-duddum-duddum/ close-up of his smug face/ ball lands inches from hole. Okay, so Tiger was the big boss, but beating him was as easy as clubbing a seal compared to the golfing wiles displayed by the title's penultimate Tiger Challenger – he could easily execute two consecutive hole-in-ones followed by a double eagle if he found himself a couple of shots down. Plus you had to play him at The Predator, the most gruelling, unforgiving course on earth. Bastard.

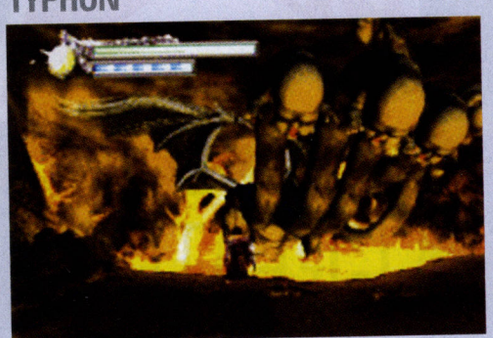
CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER
THE WHOLE SHEBANG





You know, a classically styled shoot-em-up without an end of level boss is like a mule without a spinning wheel. Really. Thankfully, *Shattered Soldier* knows that the term 'old school' means that the end of every level WILL be underlined by your battle with one of the most preposterously designed alien-robo-mutant-beasts. This one doesn't disappoint. Level one: mutant head that gobs fire. Level two: An insectiod mech. Three: Mechacaterpillar. Four: Giant fish with man's head. Five: Mutant crustacean with licking hands. Six: A morphing Frog, human, jellyfish, small ball, sperm-launching organism. Seven: Mecha-toad, human thing – possibly evil. Find weak spot, attack, dodge, repeat. If you want bosses, *Contra* is the daddy. Or boss. Or boss daddy. Whatever, it rules.

RYGAR
TYPHON



Though Tecmo's *Rygar* remake stuck pretty firmly to the third-person adventure template, Tecmo's decision to employ a deviant to design its bosses created one of the most disturbing to ever stand between the end of a level and the start of a new one. There can't have been many players ready for The Typhon – five wailing, and indeed fire-breathing, baby faces, attached to the most phallic of what can only be described as shafts protruding from the body of a dragon. To meet it in battle is to be defeated and forever scarred.

HYPER STREET FIGHTER II
M BISON



Forget the fact that he was supposed to be called Vega, whatever *nom de guerre* he goes by, he's simply the hardest bastard to ever slip into a boiler suit and armoured boots. On the toughest difficulty setting Bison could tear even the most seasoned World Warrior a new arsehole, with a line in Scissor Kick/throw corner traps that would either make you weep or bite through your own lip in frustration. His *Capcom Vs SNK* incarnation also features the best super move ever created – the Super Psycho Crusher. Or 'Psycho Crushaaaaaa' as he insists on pronouncing it.

プレイステーション

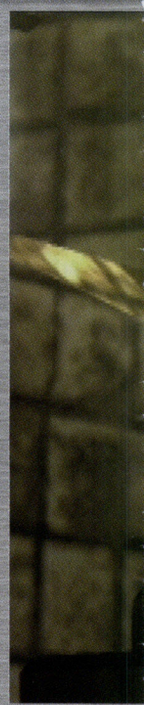
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GREATEST PLAYSTATION GAME EVER

CONSIDER THE VIRTUES OF SIMPLICITY... WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, WE GIVE YOUTHE ENCHANTING, BEAUTIFUL AND UNIQUE ICO



Though you begin with a stick, there are several weapons to collect, including a fantastic light sword.



ICO

Ico tells the story of a boy who, after growing horns on his head, is earmarked by his village for sacrifice. Escaping from his prison during a minor earth tremor, he discovers Yorda, a strange, almost ethereal young girl with a mysterious power, and takes it upon himself to make an escape for both of them. That's all the game tells you before you begin, and it's all you need to know before embarking on your adventure – therein lies the simple, innocent beauty of *Ico*. Your role is merely to lead Yorda and protect her from the shadow demons inhabiting the castle, a task hampered by the language barrier between you both, which must be compensated for with tactile connection and an understanding of Yorda's tentative body language.

At heart, *Ico* is a game of mystery and discovery, from the first switch pulled to the moment you take Yorda's hand for the final time. It's evident in the overwhelming physical enormity of the game's many chambers, often empty aside from their striking beauty and grandiose architecture. It's evident in the complete lack of gaming tutorial offered before your adventure begins, and the way the game invites you to experiment with Ico's abilities. It's evident in the sheer range of different puzzles that lie ahead of you. Witness how only a short distance into the game, you and Yorda discover a sofa. You take a seat, and encourage her to do the same. She sits, and there's a short pause before you are silently asked "Save game?". There's no diversion from the reality of the game world – narratively, the two of you sit there, dozing together for an indeterminate time, before continuing the quest once more. The experience of play is grounded wholly in Ico and Yorda physically being in the game world, and the world being almost overwhelmingly large in scope.

The fact of the matter is that no game makes you feel like a tiny character in a massive world better than *Ico*, and no other game makes its challenge seem so beyond the ability of its unlikely protagonist. It requires you to think about the enormous castle environment in both logical and abstract terms; it asks you to make both quick decisions and considered strategies in order to progress further; it demands that you stay close to Yorda to protect her, yet leave her alone in order to open new routes through the game world. Such is the attachment developed between gamer and spirit child during your shared experience that even on a second play through the game, you are no more eager to leave her side even if you are certain of her safety. In a world of darkness, Yorda *is* light, and to lose her would mean an absence of good in this terrible realm. Never in *Ico* are actions performed by rote, or for the sake of mere completion – they are always undertaken with the fate of Yorda in mind.

On a technical level, *Ico* shines as much as any game on PS2, set against an environment of

GREATEST PLAYSTATION GAME EVER

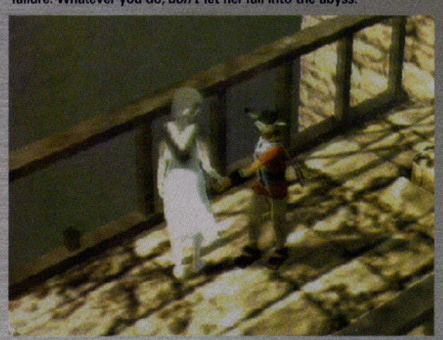


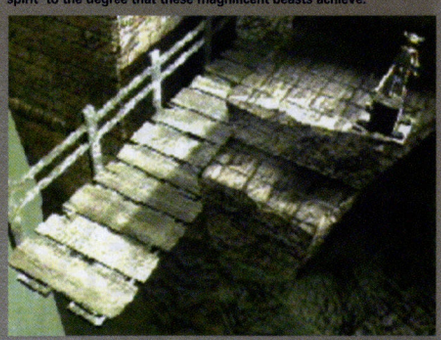


Sometimes, letting go of Yorda's hand is like asking for sudden failure. Whatever you do, *don't* let her fall into the abyss.



No other videogame horse comes close to capturing the 'equine spirit' to the degree that these magnificent beasts achieve.





limitless vision, where you can often catch a glimpse of a remote location you will visit much, *much* later. Drop from a ledge, and there's no eternal freefall in *Ico* – rather, you witness your character disappear down the chasm, before a tiny, distant splash signals his inevitable stop thousands of feet below. Additionally, all the varied environments contained within are astoundingly, incomparably beautiful, with dazzling lighting effects that bleed amber across the screen, fire which flickers and crackles, animation which flows with both the fluency and awkwardness of true human physicality – just notice the level of exertion *Ico* displays when pulling Yorda up a ledge, or her reticence in trusting you'll catch her. Additionally, the shadow beasts, rendered in one-tone black mist, stand out as almost alien against the near-photorealistic backdrops, as does the contrasting purity of Yorda herself. It's a simple tale of good versus evil, made all the more immediate by the fact that as a horned boy, you are also looking to redeem yourself. So there's a sense of pride to strengthen every achievement, a sense of relief to accompany every success. Behind every mechanical button press, the game carries the weight of human emotion and the fear of being left alone and bereft of hope. And the gameplay? Why, it's just about the cleanest engine on either PlayStation, offering complete control of both Ico and Yorda with minimal glitching and almost pixel-perfect exactitude – with the added bonus of a fierce, almost familial character bond.

Of course, many games can claim to offer an expansive three-dimensional environment, but how many of them actually require exploration (as opposed to a plodding, linear progression)? Likewise, a number of PlayStation titles – most notably Ubisoft's recent *Prince Of Persia* – can combine their platforming with a sense of humanity, but how many of these titles elicit a genuine emotional attachment toward their characters? And many games purport to give an unparalleled gaming experience, but how many developers deliver on these promises and supply a completely unique game?

ICO HAS ANIMATION WHICH FLOWS WITH BOTH THE FLUENCY AND AWKWARDNESS OF TRUE HUMAN PHYSICALITY

For many gamers – this one included – *Ico* signifies a tangible high point in the history of videogames, an experience marked by memories of deep gaming satisfaction and tears of unrestrained joy (yes, it did make me cry when Yorda reached out and grabbed *my* flailing hand during the game's fourth act, and on several other occasions, but you'd need a heart of stone not to be affected by it). In fact, such is the legacy of *Ico* for those who have experienced it, that were this poll not limited to a celebration of all things Sony and we had asked you to vote for a multiformat game of all time, chances are it would still be short-listed confidently. Why? Because *Ico* understands gaming the way classic Spielberg seemed to hold the formula for perfect cinema, or The Beatles understood popular music. Not bad for an under-publicised game which sold only 30 000 copies in PAL territories and was largely ignored by the majority of the gaming world the first time around. If you haven't played it, you're quite simply missing out on one of the most genuine, heartbreaking and downright human videogame experiences ever created. If you have played it, I can only imagine you will agree with me. ■



In the distance you can just make out a location you'll visit later. In about five hours, that is.



Yorda lacks your athletic ability, but she'll follow you to the end.



Switches cause granite blocks to shift into a staircase – the sense of a palpable environment is unsurpassed.



Yorda's spiritual power is enhanced when the two of you link hands.

プレイステーション

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FINAL FANTASY VII

IT'S THE GAME THAT (ALLEGEDLY) MADE GROWN MEN CRY AND CEMENTED THE PLACE OF RPGS IN THE MINDS OF MAINSTREAM WESTERN GAMERS – THE ONE AND ONLY FINAL FANTASY VII

There used to be a conspiracy in the world of gaming, not discovered by a Deep Throat type shady figure, but by the release of *Final Fantasy VII*. It was said that there was an entire genre of wonderful games being passed over for translation into the English language, one containing hours of engrossing gameplay – it was, of course, the console RPG, and amazingly it took videogame companies and the general public until the seventh title in one of Japan's most beloved series to realise that they were missing out big time.

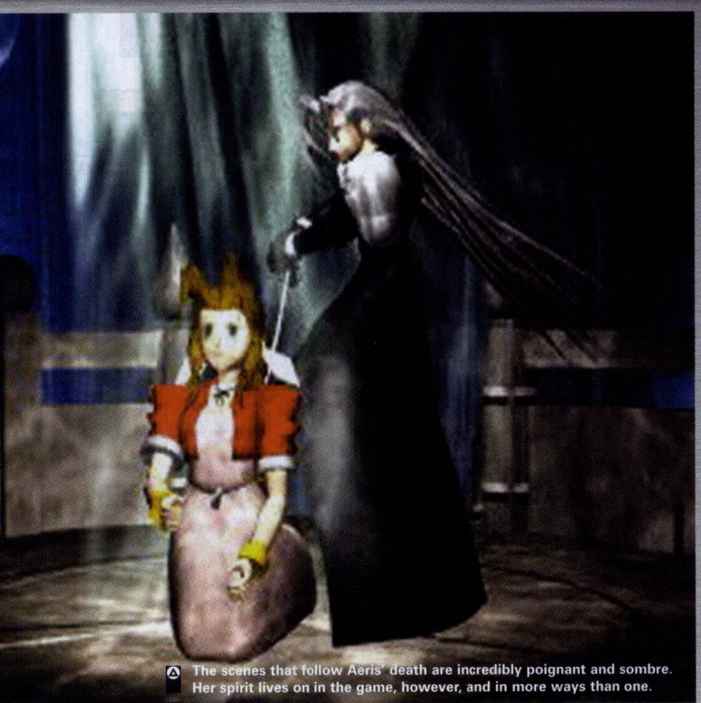
Right from the get-go *Final Fantasy* grips stronger than any RPG released before or since. The opening sequence was a revelation. The camera pans through a gritty, industrial city, revealing an active populace. When the camera settles at a railway station, a train draws to a halt and characters pile out; you then realise that you are in control – the guy with the spiky blond hair is at your command and something's going down. So do something. Now *that's* how to start an RPG – *Final Fantasy VII* has a sense of pace, and indeed scale, that subsequent chapters have failed to deliver.

The spiky blond guy is, of course, Cloud Strife, an ex-SOLDIER (an elite, hallowed rank of warrior) – or so he thinks. He's a bit loopy and he's having flashbacks and blackouts, which is all very manga. He's also freelancing for terrorist, sorry, freedom fighter outfit AVALANCHE lead by the Mr T-esque Barrett, who communicates in jive-talk punctuated with expletives and much fist-shaking and body-quaking rage. The focus of his rage is the malevolent Shinra corporation, who, when not meddling with science and the planet's energy source, find time to kill Barrett's wife. We pity the fools.

The ragtag cast of characters that form your party is one of the most diverse, balanced and richly thought out of any collection of people gathered together to form an RPG team; Tifa, a bar hostess and AVALANCHE member and Aeris, golden child and flower seller, combine with Cloud to create quite a love triangle. Later recruits include the Native American/Lion hybrid Red XIII, rescued from a Shinra experiment, Vincent, a vampire-like figure, and Cait Sith, the most miserable turncoat since Judas. The final roster includes jungle ninja Yuffie and (of course) Cid, making his trademark appearance, grizzled as ever and on the verge of becoming the first man in space.

It's not just the megalomaniacs at Shinra that you lock horns with, either. There's the small matter of enigmatic nemesis Sephiroth – the embodiment of everything Cloud wishes he was, equally loopy, blessed with an even larger sword, but as twisted and destructive as evildoers come. The final battle between your party and

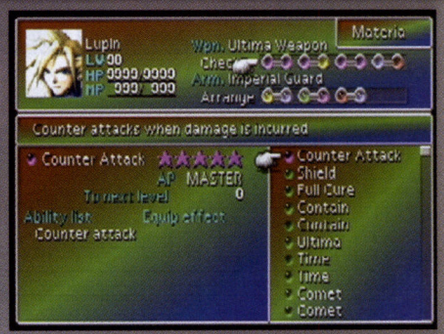
GREATEST PLAYSTATION GAME EVER



The scenes that follow Aeris' death are incredibly poignant and sombre. Her spirit lives on in the game, however, and in more ways than one.



The map screen in all its glory – the sense of scale it imparted was almost oppressive.



Not a very entertaining screenshot, but the Materia system is both immediately accessible and satisfyingly intricate.





Sephiroth presents a battle between good and evil of Biblical proportions, as if the book of *Revelations* was a movie directed by Michael Bay. Sephiroth's character was so intimidating that when a face off with him loomed it imparted a sense of dread, a sense of 'I'm not ready to take him on' and a sense of utter fear.

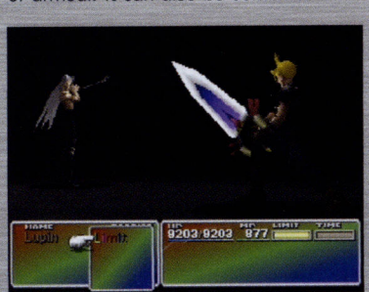
However, when it comes to 'emotional content' there are few moments since the creation of the videogame that have spawned such widespread fervour and mourning as the death of Aeris at Sephiroth's blade. It speaks volumes about the quality of the game's storytelling that gamers genuinely cared that Aeris was killed. Grown men cried. She was, after all, a delicate soul – how could she not be? She sold flowers for a living in a desolate, colourless world. The moment she died firmly cemented Sephiroth as gaming's greatest villain.

But beneath the veneer and the story that sweeps you along are a number of wonderfully executed RPG staples. While *Final Fantasy VII*'s battle system is undeniably basic, it is wonderfully complimented by a far more subtle and nuanced magic or 'Materia' system. Spells are facilitated by Materia – coloured baubles only harnessed when slotted into weapons or armour. It can also be combined with support Materia, modifying a spell's effect. Perhaps the most infamous aspect, however, is the game's Summon Materia, where your team call forth beasts and gods of extreme violence to smash foes. The extravagance with which these sequences are animated was unprecedented at the time.

And believe it or not, that's just the bare bones of the game – the world map facilitated an awesome feeling of exploration, as well as exhibiting an excellent degree of proficiency with the PlayStation architecture, initially navigated on foot, then on Chocobo, hovercraft and then by airship, opening up new locations to explore. Chocobos could be bred or raced, Cloud could go on a date with Aeris, Tifa or even Barrett if you desired and even a brothel could be infiltrated with Cloud in drag. At key moments Cloud took to his trusty Hardy Daytona motorbike, went snowboarding or engaged in a gruelling squat battle in a gym populated by moustachioed bodybuilders. There's even a fully-fledged strategy game in there at Fort Condor. Not only were these instances entertaining in their own right, they added depth and flavour to each location, with themselves featuring perfectly pre-rendered backgrounds such as the ruinous slums, the hazy glow of Wall Market with its accompanying Reggae background music, the neon lit Gold Saucer and the oppressive atmosphere of Nibelheim.

FEW MOMENTS HAVE SPAWNED SUCH WIDESPREAD FERVOUR AND MOURNING AS THE DEATH OF AERIS AT SEPHIROTH'S BLADE

In terms of presentation, *Final Fantasy VII* excelled, its CGI cut-scenes elevating key plot revelations, the mood of each moment perfectly accentuated by musical compositions. Yet while the impact of its graphics have certainly faded and been surpassed by later instalments, the fact remains that the beauty of the characters and the unique insights into them afforded the player over the course of the game has meant that *Final Fantasy VII* remains the definitive *Final Fantasy*, the greatest RPG ever made, and, of course, my choice for the greatest PlayStation game of all time. ■



The final confrontation with Sephiroth is what the whole of the game is a preamble to.



This Church is a key location in the game – its interior is most tranquil.



Summoned beasts and spells are often incendiary in nature and immense in power.



Mako energy engulfs the planet at the game's conclusion as nature reasserts itself.

IT'S AS GOOD AS WE CAN MAKE IT, REALLY...

RELEASE LIST

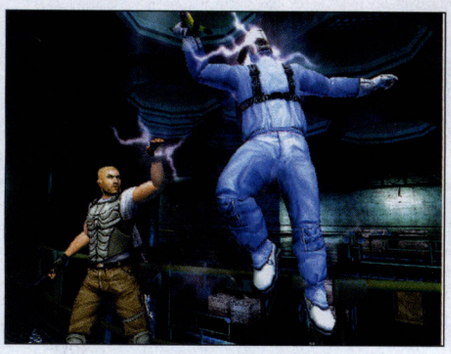
JUNE

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER
DRIV3R	ATARI
ETERNAL QUEST	ICE STORM
FOOTBALL GENERATION	ICE STORM
FORMULA ONE 2004	SONY
.HACK VOL 2 – MUTATION	ATARI
HYPER STREET FIGHTER II	CAPCOM
INDY CAR 2005	CODEMASTERS
ONIMUSHA BLADE WARRIORS	CAPCOM
RED DEAD REVOLVER	ROCKSTAR
RETRO ARCADE	ICE STORM
ROLLERCOASTER WORLD	ICE STORM
SAMURAI JACK	SEGA
SAMURAI WARRIOR	EA
SHREK 2	ACTIVISION
SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN	SONY
SMASH COURT TENNIS PRO TOURNAMENT 2	NAMCO
ULTIMATE MIND GAMES	ICE STORM
X-TREME SPEED	ICE STORM



JULY

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER
ARMY MEN SARGE'S WAR	GLOBALSTAR
ATHENS 2004 OLYMPIC GAMES	SONY
CATWOMAN	EA
CLASSIFIED: THE SENTINEL CRISIS	GLOBALSTAR
COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS	ACCLAIM
MTV MUSIC GENERATOR 3	CODEMASTERS
ONIMUSHA 3	CAPCOM
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
SHELLSHOCK NAM 67	EIDOS
SPIDERMAN 2	ACTIVISION
TT SUPERBIKES	QVS
X-FILES: RESIST OR SERVE	VIVENDI



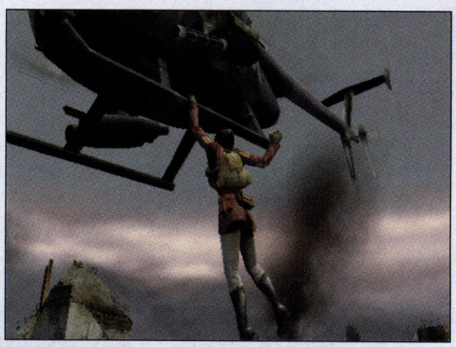
AUGUST

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER
CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST	UBISOFT
HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION	SEGA
NHL 2005	EA
VIETCONG PURPLE HAZE	GATHERING



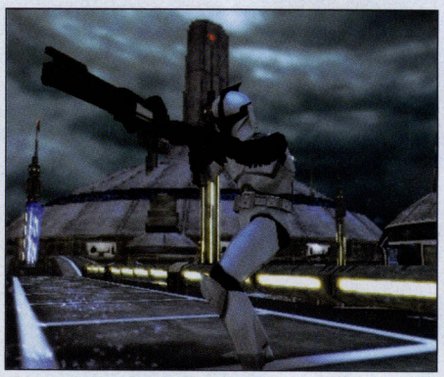
SEPTEMBER

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER
BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN	EA
DEF JAM 2 FIGHT FOR NEW YORK	EA
JUICED	ACCLAIM
KARAOKE STAGE	KONAMI
MADDEN 2005	EA
RED STAR	ACCLAIM
RIBBIT KING	ATARI
SILENT HILL 4	KONAMI
STAR OCEAN 3	UBISOFT
TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005	EA
WORMS FORTS: UNDER SIEGE	SEGA



OCTOBER

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER
CRASH UNLIMITED	VIVENDI
DUKES OF HAZZARD: RETURN OF THE GENERAL LEE	UBISOFT
FIFA 2005	EA
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	SIERRA
MOTOCROSS MANIA 3	GLOBALSTAR
NBA LIVE 2005	EA
OUTLAW GOLF 2	GLOBALSTAR
RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK	CAPCOM
SCALER	GLOBALSTAR
TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2005	EA
TRIVIAL PURSUIT UNHINGED	ATARI
TY THE TASMANIAN TIGER 2	EA



NOVEMBER

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER
100 BULLETS	ACCLAIM
GOLDENEYE 2	EA
LORD OF THE RINGS TRILOGY: THE THIRD AGE	EA
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	EA
ROCKY LEGENDS	UBISOFT
THE URBZ: SIMS IN THE CITY	EA



Q4 2004

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER
CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR	ACTIVISION
FIGHT CLUB	FOX INTERACTIVE
KOOKABUNGA	VIVENDI
LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS	ACTIVISION
NOTORIOUS DIE TO DRIVE	UBISOFT
PREDATOR: CONCRETE JUNGLE	FOX INTERACTIVE
RED NINJA: END OF HONOUR	VIVENDI
SHARK'S TALE	ACTIVISION
SPYRO: A HERO'S TAIL	VIVENDI
STARCRAFT: GHOST	BLIZZARD
TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2	ACTIVISION
X-MEN LEGENDS	ACTIVISION

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. So don't blame us if a game comes out late (or early; it does happen sometimes, you know).

PREVIEWS

The man with a gun. Along with 'fast car!', it's the staple diet of any worthy game publisher. We like man with gun. He's got a gun. And he's a loner – sorry – lone wolf. He's going to save the world and he's going to do it with his gun. Yes, he's a man and he makes us feel like men. This is good. Me Tarzan.

This month's preview section is a shrine to *him*. Worship him at our altar: *Syphon Filter*, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*, *Mercenaries*, *Paratroopers* and *Headhunter: Redemption*. These are the icons that we males kneel to and pray. Hallelujah! God be praised! The world can only be saved with a clip of 5.56 hollow points and a five o'clock shadow!

Let the wars begin!



44 SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

WE'LL EXCUSE GENERIC STUBBLE WHEN IT LOOKS THIS GOOD









ALPHAS AND BETAS

Just what is the difference between an Alpha and Beta preview?



ALPHA
The latest screenshots of all the latest games and all the info on the games we have at the time. It's unlikely that we will have played the game at this point so we'll also be talking direct to the developers to bring you as much exclusive information as possible.



BETA
This is where we give you our first verdict on games. There will be plenty of opinion about how the game's shaping up – we'll be very specific about what it's like to play, the game's successes and failings and you'll only get screenshots that show you what the game looks like when you're playing it.

ALPHA

ALPHA
First looks and Q&As

30 **KILLER7**
Cel-shading just got a whole lot seriouser.

32 **METAL GEAR SOLID 3**
Snake's fast becoming our favourite nature boy.

34 **STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT**
A long time ago, Lucas didn't suck the fat one.

36 **MERCENARIES**
LucasArts has been watching *Kelly's Heroes*.

38 **JUICED**
We're guessing this is one of those cool terms.

40 **COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS**
An RPG that isn't based on a fake war.

42 **FARENHEIT**
This looks cool. Trust us, that was a great pun.

43 **THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS**
They're all so scary – how can it be for kids?

BETA
Hands on and up front

44 **SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW**
A wealth of stealth that'll improve your health.

46 **PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY**
You have to read our minds to see this caption.

48 **HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION**
Leeza X? Well, they could have called her Dido.

KILLER7

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Production Studio 4/Grasshopper Manufacturer Inc.
WEB SITE: www.capcom-europe.com

GENRE
» ADVENTURE/ FIRST PERSON

NO. PLAYERS
» x 1

TAKE NOTE:

- Lead character Harman Smith has seven alternate personalities – the whackjob.
- Kun Lan turns people into zombies with his 'Heaven Smile'.
- Produced by Resident Evil luminaries Shinji Mikami and Hiroyuki Kobayashi.

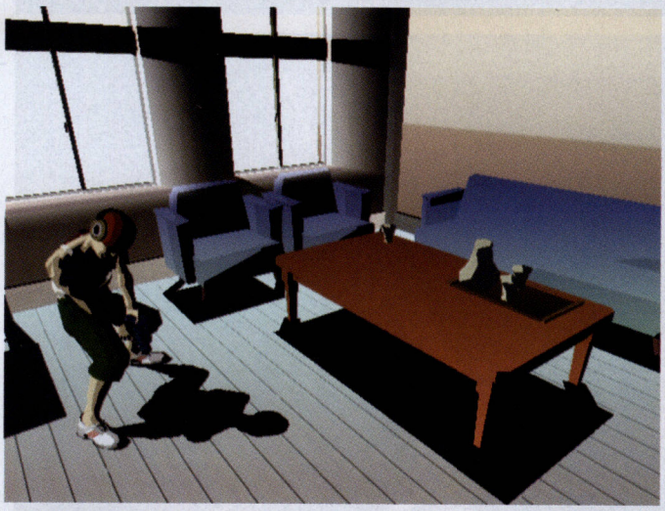
ANTICIPATION 81%
10% 30% 50% 70% 90%

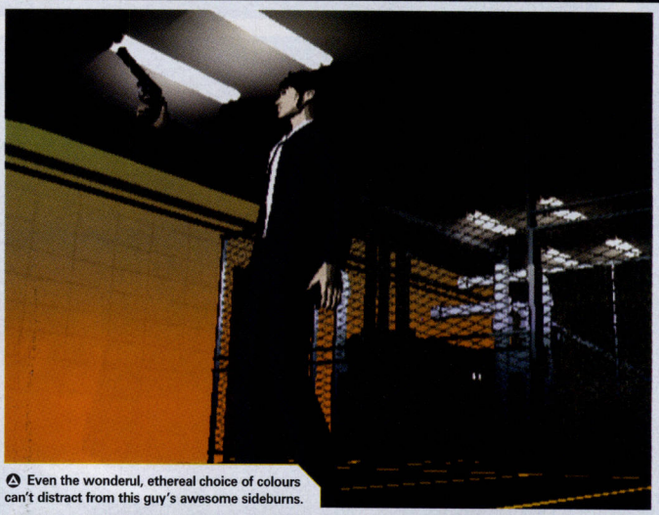
FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

DEVIL MAY CRY	93%
RESIDENT EVIL: CODE VERONICA	85%

ALPHA

RELEASE DATE TBC





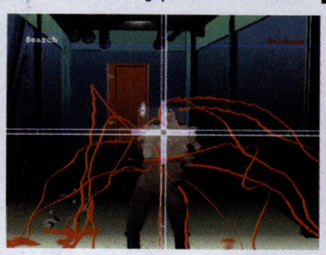
Even the wonderful, ethereal choice of colours can't distract from this guy's awesome sideburns.



Pointilist fans will vomit with excitement when they see *Killer7*'s homage to the artform.



A lesser person would comment on the lack of attention to detail and textures. A lesser person mind.



"You are what you eat." If that's the case then this guy needs to lay off the jelly snakes.



Cel-shaded or otherwise, in reality or video-games – men with dangly earrings just look silly.

BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

You've got to hand it to the guys at Capcom – they sure know how to conjure up a bizarre plot. As you know, our 'hero', in the loosest sense of the word, is Harman Smith – a man with *seven* different personalities. One of these is a woman called Kaede Smith. Now, poor old Kaede is unaware of this and just happens to be in love with Coyote and Dan – again, two different characters within Harman's addled mind. Which means, if you've followed the threads, that Kaede is not only in love with herself twice over but completely unaware that she doesn't really exist. Weirdo.



Kaede Smith – she loves herself and doesn't exist at the same time. The poppet.



This is Kaede again. Kind of. Still, if we were this good looking we'd love ourselves.

KILLER7

IT'S THE VAGUENESS THAT'S THE KILLER

Getting hold of any concrete information on *Killer7* is, we're willing to bet, substantially harder than squeezing blood from a particularly dry stone. Much to our disappointment, all that was on show at E3 was a trailer video and the tangle of 'facts' doing the rounds is as confused as the personality of *Killer7*'s main protagonist.

Players are charged with the control of 60 year old Harman Smith – the man they call 'God Killer' – on a mission to kill one time friend Kun Lan, who happens to be blessed with a 'divine touch'. This is not the sort of thing boasted by male escorts, but in fact the ability to impart a 'Heaven Smile' on a victim – a manic grin that turns people into zombies, various incarnations of which will attempt to self destruct next to Harman in order to eliminate him. A further complication is the fact that the zombies are hard to spot with the naked eye, so their presence must be detected through the use of a scanner.

Because playing as a lame old man, even if he is equipped with an anti-tank rifle, is no recipe for an action-packed game, players will also take control of the embodiments of Harman's seven different personalities – Garcian, Dan, Mask, Coyote, Kevin, Kaede and Con. Each has his or her (yes, Harman even has a female personality) own weapon of choice and distinctive ability – Garcian is clairvoyant, Dan can change bullet trajectories with his mind, Coyote can move through solid objects and Con has an acute sense of hearing. It doesn't exactly take a leap of faith to predict that each skill will have different ramifications for the player.

AREAS ARE SWITCHED BETWEEN USING TEXT BASED PROMPTS AND A SHIFT FROM FIRST TO THIRD PERSON

Up until recent screenshots were released by Capcom, it was difficult to fathom exactly how *Killer7* would ultimately play, however, Capcom has clarified that the game includes both first-person and third-person playing styles, while key areas are switched between using text based prompts and a viewpoint shift from third- to first-person occurring whenever the player engages an enemy in combat. While this may sound limiting, there is obvious potential for sophisticated movie-like direction, an enticing prospect considering the unusual nature of the game's plot.

Additional tidbits of information include the revelation from the game's producers that the experience will be 'totally unique,' that additional weapons will be included and that the game will take roughly ten hours to complete. We're enthralled, but still a little baffled as to how it will all hang together. ■

WHAT WE SAY »

GETTING HOLD OF ANY CONCRETE INFORMATION ON KILLER7 IS, WE'RE WILLING TO BET, SUBSTANTIALLY HARDER THAN SQUEEZING BLOOD FROM A STONE

'This game is the ultimate in style and action. Going places no game has gone before, *Killer7* is set to thrill the world.'
Capcom Press Release

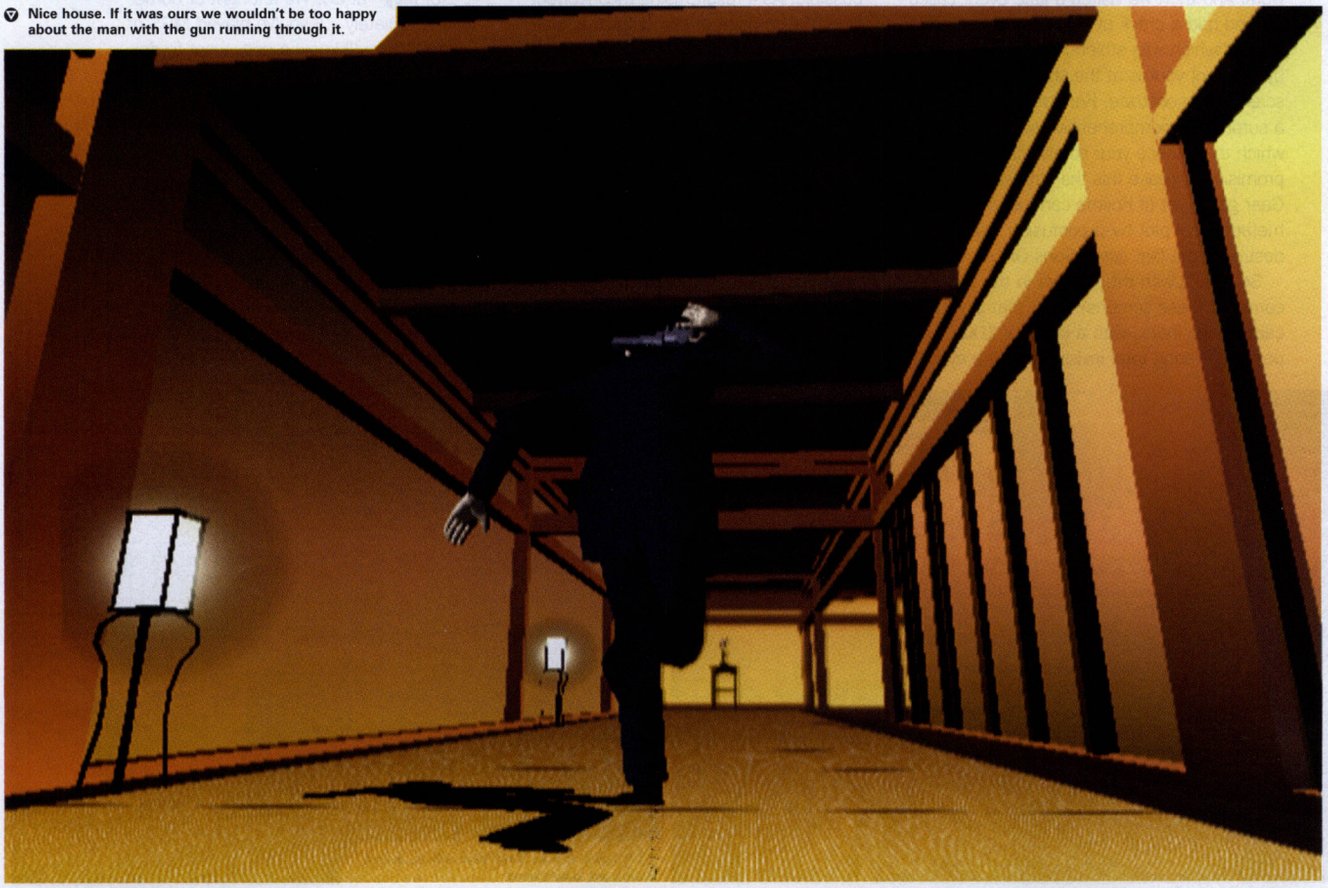
« WHAT THEY SAY





△ Why does this guy run with his gun behind his head like that? Maybe he suffers with nits.

▽ Nice house. If it was ours we wouldn't be too happy about the man with the gun running through it.





△ This screen really does test our *Killer7* captioning abilities to their limits. And beyond.



△ We swear this guy was in *Watchmen*. Wonder if he'll drop any bad guys down a lift shaft?



△ You're not likely to see cel-shaded blood in bullet-time motion that often, are you?



△ Granted this is the best-looking bathroom we've ever seen in a game... but green? That's *so* 2003.

A VIEW TO A KILL

It's not the services-to-mental-illness-awareness plot or vagaries of how it'll play that's ensured that every new screenshot of *Killer7* released has been lapped up by magazines, it's the game's heavy on the style quota visuals – Seventies-cop-show-meets-cel-shading-meets-film-noir. The clean, bold lines of the cel-shaded protagonists are at times moodily emphasised by strong, one directional lighting and dramatic camera angles, making one thing for certain: *Killer7* challenges the association of cel-shading and cute and cuddly graphics.



Ignore the tough looking dude and look at those trees – they're 2D – how's that for stylised?



Extreme angle shot, Seventies cop show hair, stealth-look polo neck and suit combo – that's too cool for words.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-house
WEB SITE: www.konamijpn.com/products/mgs3/

GENRE
» STEALTH/ ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» 1 x 1

TAKE NOTE:

_ Features a unique camouflage system.
_ Jungle-based stealth adventure, promising a unprecedented gameplaying experience.
_ Snake's back!

ANTICIPATION
10% 30% 50% 70% 85% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY 71%
CASTLEVANIA 81%

ALPHA

RELEASE DATE
TBC

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

SNAKES USUALLY SHED THEIR SKIN. THIS ONE JUST CHANGES HIS TRACKSUIT

The tantalizing drip-feed of *MGS3* information continues apace, as **play**™ was invited to see a Kojima-prepared Powerpoint presentation and a video highlighting exactly how Snake's (if indeed it *is* Snake) jungle camouflage feature will work. And then we visited a little event called E3 and had a crack at the one-level demo (a copy of which was stolen from a demo pod by a pair of youths at the show). As these screens demonstrate, Konami has included a surprisingly comprehensive system by which to enhance your stealth capabilities, promising to make this the strongest *Metal Gear* game yet (if Kojima can just avoid the metaphysical plot-twist confusion that destroyed the last act of *Sons Of Liberty*).

So what's with the number in the top right corner of these screens? Well, that is your camouflage index, with a score of 100 percent offering total invisibility to the eyes of *MGS*'s identikit villains. The score is a reflection of several in-game factors (your posture, background environment, camouflage and face paint) and these aspects are all controllable throughout the game in order to keep as well hidden as possible. As a result, using the incorrect type of face paint or camouflage actually aids your discovery, as you are bound to stick out against the jungle like Michael Jackson at a pre-teen slumber party.

The text to the left of the index figure shows which type of camouflage and paint you are currently using, with seven different camo patterns currently on offer (see boxout). So basically, crouching down will automatically give you an invisibility index score of 65 percent, and this figure will be either improved upon or lessened depending on the clothing and make-up used to accompany the position (wearing black face paint while hidden in bright, leafy foliage is a no-no, and from first impressions, we would imagine that the fire camo is practically useless without the presence of some covering flames).

Playing the demo itself was a high priority for **play**™ at E3. We felt right at home immediately – if you've played *MGS* or *MGS2* you'll know exactly what to do. Creeping through the jungle was never so much fun, though there were an awful lot of cut-scenes...

Of course, Konami has always been less than forthcoming when it comes to the inner workings of new *Metal Gear Solid* titles, but as the information filters through and as we get our hands on various pieces of demo and preview code, we're gradually piecing together a fuller picture of what the game holds. What we really want to see now is what lies beyond the jungle... ■

WHAT NOT TO WEAR

The choice of seven camouflage sets will be initially daunting for many, but as their effectiveness boils down to matching like patterns, most gamers will pick it up pretty quickly. As well as the standard black, leaf and olive designs, there are also tree bark and tiger stripe designs (the latter for use when hiding in rushes or tall grass). While last summer's E3 gave us some dramatic shots of Snake emerging from a fiery water hole, it may come as a surprise that as well as the flame camo, Konami has also included a snow print outfit, suggesting that the final game will feature some intense environmental weather conditions. Current rumours also suggest that other prints may also become available for download later.



Snow print can be useful to add a bit of water camouflage, although it's not perfect.



Expect a range of 'Where's Snake?' picture books to follow. Or not.



Of course, murder is still acceptable if you are well-hidden enough.





△ It's good to have Snake back with us, even if it turns out to be a clone.



△ Black camo is pretty conspicuous against anything other than shadow...



△ ...so the black make-up will be of little help in keeping you out of sight...



△ ...of course, fire shouldn't help you here, but surprisingly, it doesn't make you more visible...



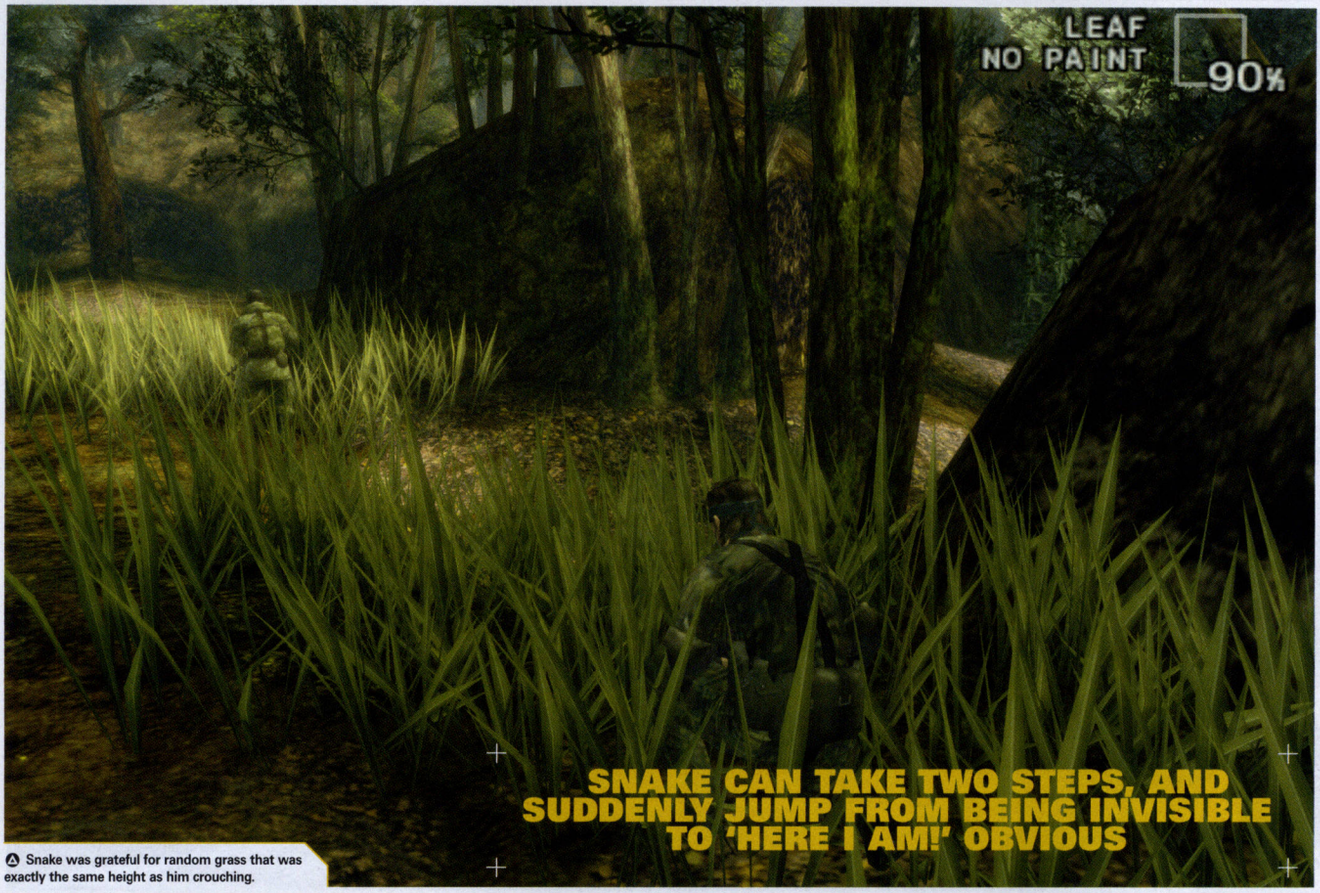
△ ...while tree bark camo with woodland paint is five percent better, with an index of 50 percent.

WHAT WE SAY »

SNAKE WAS SO WELL CAMOUFLAGED THAT IT LITERALLY BECAME HARD TO SPOT HIM WITH THE NAKED EYE...

"Snake Eater's lush locale can be used to Snake's advantage, and the free-roaming gameplay allows the player to approach problems laterally."
Konami Press Release

« WHAT THEY SAY



Snake was grateful for random grass that was exactly the same height as him crouching.





The visuals show an improvement even on the gorgeous *Sons Of Liberty*.



Standing doesn't offer much protection at the best of times, and that camo isn't helping...



...but the snow print, with at least a bit of green striping, will bring your index up to 25 percent.



Tiger stripe seems to catch the light less than the snow, but actually hides you a little less...



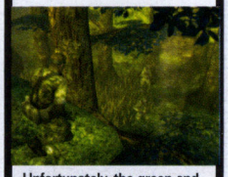
...while this standing, treebark ensemble actually gives a negative camouflage index of -5.

DON'T EVEN BREATHE

Although previous *Snake Eater* footage has focussed upon clever ways to use the environment (knocking a hornet's nest onto an unsuspecting guard, popping out of a river before shooting an enemy), the video demonstration witnessed by **play**™ didn't feature one single round being fired, or any guards being maimed or killed. Frankly, it was all about the stealth, to the extent that Snake donned an alligator's skin to disguise himself and scare away any local human threat! The use of camouflage also heightened the varied effect of the uneven floor surfaces Konami has been keen to highlight, as well as the differing sound effects emitted by moving over the game's various ground coverings.



Your body may be hidden adequately, but those badniks will still see your face.



Unfortunately, the green-and-brown *MGS3* may not suit the colourblind gamer.



Of course, the hidey-seeky element of jungle warfare extends up the trees too.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

ALPHA

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Pandemic Studios
DEVELOPER: LucasArts
WEB SITE: www.lucasarts.com

GENRE
» SHOOT-'EM-UP

NO. PLAYERS
» x 1-32

TAKE NOTE:

- Supports 16 players online or up to 32 via LAN.
- Features locations from both classic and *Attack Of The Clones* eras.
- Fight on foot, from the cockpit of an X-Wing, speeder or an AT-ST.

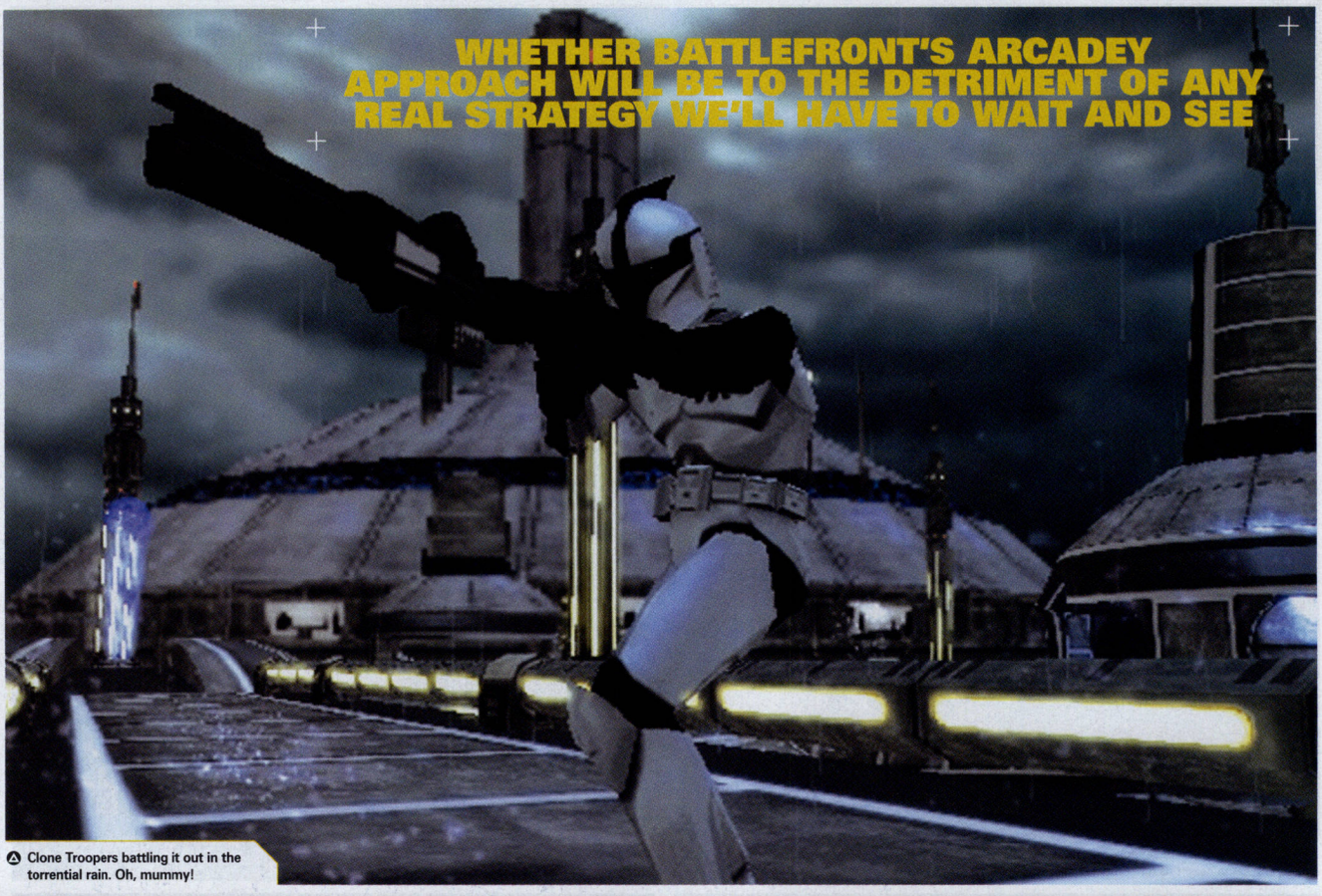
ANTICIPATION
10% 30% 50% 70% 81% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

STAR WARS: CLONE WARS	55%
ARMY MEN RTS	78%

RELEASE DATE
SEPT 2004

WHETHER BATTLEFRONT'S ARCADEY APPROACH WILL BE TO THE DETRIMENT OF ANY REAL STRATEGY WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE



Clone Troopers battling it out in the torrential rain. Oh, mummy!

THESE *ARE* THE DROIDS YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

Whereas a dead droid is just a pile of scrap metal, the droideka (destroyer droid) is pretty tricky to get the better of. While it may be slow to waddle around on its spindly legs in attack mode, its rate of fire is unrelenting with the potential for decimating enemy troops extremely high. It's also capable of rolling itself into a sphere for high-speed negotiation of the battlefield. A similar amount of thought has gone into balancing the other troops across the board and pitching one against the other will certainly be intriguing.



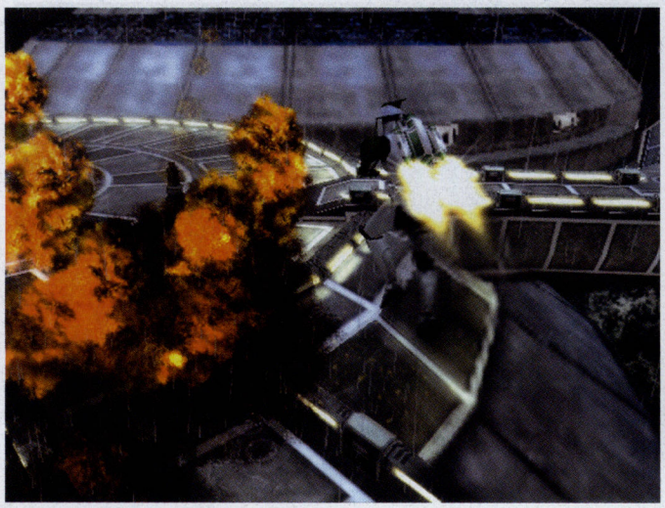
A teeny-weeny droideka here – one of the most powerful player controllable units.



And here's a bog standard battle droid. Roger, roger and all that.

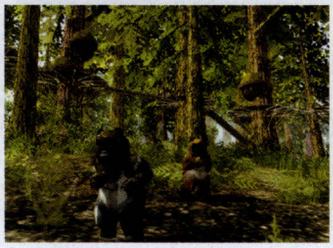


Here's more mechanical nonsense, but it's *Star Wars* so, naturally, we're excited.





This may look good, but just how does the 'trooper plan on using his scope with that helmet?



"And they said we'd never be back after *Jedi* and that crappy cartoon. Hahahaha!! Idiots."



The landscapes need to be expansive and filled with action. So far, so good.



Speeder bikes. Don't you just love 'em? We just hope they're controllable this time around.



These wheely things from *Episode II* seem to be designed to explode spectacularly.

WHAT WE SAY »

THROW IN THE ABILITY TO PILOT X-WINGS WITH PLAYER-CONTROLLED WINGMEN AND THE SCOPE OF BATTLEFRONT'S SKIRMISHES BECOMES APPARENT

"Star Wars Battlefront is a multiplayer action game that will put fans and gamers in the heat of the action as they relive all of the epic *Star Wars* battles"
LucasArts press release

« WHAT THEY SAY

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

NO PARAPHRASING STAR WARS, NO PARAPHRASING STAR WARS...

With games like *SOCOM* and, ahem, *SOCOM II* leading the online charge and anything with a few *Star Wars* characters bunged on guaranteed to shift a few units, merging the two styles of game together is a no-brained money-spinner. And that's pretty much what *Star Wars Battlefront* does. However, just because the idea is so obvious you've probably remarked to your mates about how much fun it would be to play an online *Star Wars* shoot-'em-up, doesn't mean that developer Pandemic Studios has just slapped a load of *Star Wars* textures on an existing title and shoved it out the door at hyperspace speeds. No. Instead, Pandemic has poured a little bit more care over Battlefront, ensuring that it includes the right mix of units, vehicles, locations and accessiblity to appeal to players that would have little desire to play an online shoot-'em-up if it didn't feature such an evocative license.

Battlefront takes a scattergun approach to the *Star Wars* universe, offering both classic and Clone Wars eras to battle in, each featuring a different set of opposing sides – the Rebel Alliance and Galactic Empire, and the Republic Clone Army and Separatist Battle Droid Army respectively. It's Light Vs Dark and Good Vs Evil, but, fittingly for a game that can boast as many as 32 players simultaneously, it views the war from the point of view of the minions – everyday foot soldiers or cannon fodder. It's a good way to settle the problems presented by force abilities and the balancing that such things would involve, so instead of picking from Han or Luke at the beginning of a classic-era, light side battle, you choose from the likes of an X-Wing pilot, a no-name weapons specialist or a random wookie. Equally with the dark side, you would choose from assorted stormtroopers, including one equipped with a jet pack for the ultimate in battlefield mobility. If you discount the vehicles, that is. Throw in the ability to pilot X-Wings, AT-STs and speeder bikes with player-controlled wingmen and gunners and both the scale and scope of *Battlefront*'s skirmishes becomes apparent.

Another twist is the ability to unlock various effects to aid your side in battle, including a certain Mr Vader to cut a swathe through those rebel scum. The online structure will see players compete to takeover as many planets as possible including Hoth, Geonosis, Yavin, Tatooine and Naboo.

Whether *Battlefront*'s arcadey approach will be to the detriment of any real strategy, we'll have to wait and see. It's got the Force all right, we just don't know how much. ■

FUNNY LITTLE FELLAS

Just to add an extra splash of authenticity, Pandemic has incorporated a few native species for some of the planets, which give aid to, or hinder your side, depending on whether you're on the side of piety or wickedness. Ewoks attack stormtroopers as little teddy bears are wont to do when battling on Endor, while Jawas and Sand people pop up from time to time to cause a nuisance of themselves on their turf.



We believe 'Beecha wowwa' is the Ewok vernacular for this particular screenshot.

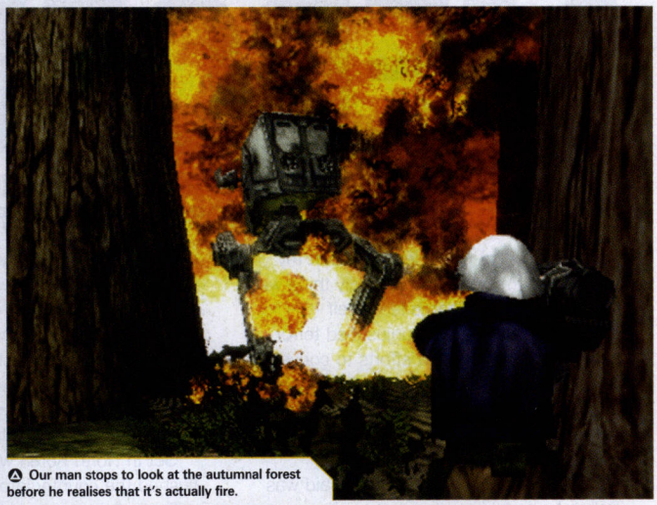


A sight that will please many *Star Wars* fans. And by 'many', we mean 'all'.



Incredibly, people still blame the Ewoks for *Jedi*, rather than Lucas himself.





Our man stops to look at the autumnal forest before he realises that it's actually fire.



He might have a gun, but those pantaloons do ruin his hard man image.



Oh, come on – as if Stormtroopers could ever actually shoot anything.



Stormtroopers? Check. *Jedi* environment? Check. Odd looking green man-thing? Check.



Left 'trooper had heard right 'trooper say something about his momma.

MERCENARIES

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Lucas Arts
DEVELOPER: Pandemic
WEB SITE: www.lucasarts.com

GENRE
» ACTION ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» x 1

TAKE NOTE:

_ Features the Havok physics engine of *Max Payne 2* fame.

_ Set in North Korea, a country that features in Bush's Axis Of Evil.

_ Over 30 weapons for you to use.

ANTICIPATION
10% 30% 50% 89% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS 93%
ARMY MEN: RTS 85%

ALPHA

RELEASE DATE
SPRING 2004

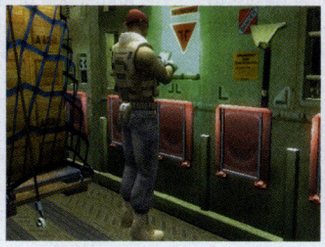




Ha! Tanks for the memories! Jimmy the comedian escapes once again.



James had a habit of playing anything long, hard and metallic like a didgeridoo.



How very darling! This soldier has a pink bandana that just screams warrior. Grrr.



He had spoken to his gardner about sloppy workmanship before, now it was time to take action.



Helicopter and the Havok physics engine – together as God himself intended.

GETTING UP TO GET DOWN

Mercenaries gives you a wide variety of environments to play in, each with their best heel planted firmly in reality. You can move around on foot, in tank or helicopter and dominate the battle space anyway you see fit, even if you wish to clamber to the top of a bridge and hide out with a purse full of grenades. Games that feature such freedom often fall down by feeling empty, but *Mercenaries* is packed with detail and stitched together with Havok. It's bloody ace.



If you had a tank, you could run through the enemy trooper and crush his house – just like in Palestine!



Standing on bridges, feeling all lonesome. At last our other hobby gets incorporated into a game.

MERCENARIES

KILL A MAN FOR MONEY AND YOU'RE A HERO, LOVE HIM AND YOU'RE A PROSTITUTE – GO FIGURE

"So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyses needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." Franklin D. Roosevelt said that during his inaugural address in 1933. Poor sod never new he'd be quoted in the indent for Pandemic Studios. Obviously what they should have said was "We have nothing to fear but another insulting *Star Wars* title." We're thinking *Clone Wars* here. If you've played it, you may, like us, have been amused by the "nothing to fear..." quote that was swiftly followed by a game that you really should. Luckily the videogame industry is not an environment plagued by natural laws and it is quite possible for any studio to change its spots by just launching one game. Thankfully, there is nothing here to indicate that *Mercenaries* is destined to be as much as a ramshackle experience as *Clone Wars*, especially when you consider the promise that's riding shotgun with these screenshots.

Set in North Korea where a coup has flushed the country into a state of militarised panic, you play a lone mercenary type who is tasked to track down fifty-two fugitives of the old members of the old regime before they can launch a nuclear attack. Fifty-two to capture, fifty-two levels, fifty-two cards in a deck, each one representing a wanted man – just like in *Gulf War II*. Modern combat may inspire this game's conflicts but it certainly doesn't dictate it as you can choose alliances between rival factions and pilot or drive more than twenty-two ground and air vehicles. You also have access to more than thirty weapons that the press release describes as "deadly" and we should hope so too.

All this posturing has been given the gift of a realistic physics courtesy of the very same Havok engine that made *Max Payne 2* so weighty. Havok's proven great for ragdoll and flying crates, but here it will actually destroy buildings. Marvellous.

Now *Mercenaries*' freedom of violent expression may sound all well and dandy but it could so easily be *Clone Wars II* – a clanging set of tin cans of a game whose ideas stand out far less than their astounding lack of cohesion, although this is looking increasingly unlikely with Pandemic seemingly getting its colonic-refuse together. ■

HAVOK'S GREAT FOR RAGDOLL AND FLYING CRATES BUT HERE IT WILL DESTROY BUILDINGS

WHAT WE SAY »

REALISTIC PHYSICS COURTESY OF THE VERY SAME HAVOK ENGINE THAT MADE MAX PAYNE 2 SO WEIGHTY

"With *Mercenaries*, if you can see it, you can steal it, use it or blow it up."
Lucas Arts, Press Release

« WHAT THEY SAY





△ In a world of green, one man was brave enough to be yellow.

▽ Things go boom and people get blown away. Fair enough, but we're sure the guy on the left is flying.





△ Young Jimmy never did really understand the whole 'Let's go out and get tanked' thing.



△ To save on any your left/my right confusion, they decided to blow both sides up simultaneously.



△ War. What is it good for? Videogames and the West's economy apparently.



△ Lighting farts had all of a sudden been taken to the next level.

»

BIG GUNS

Nothing short of total war. By swapping between vehicles and weapon systems you must constantly shift your strategy to fit the situation. This scene of destruction details an Anti-Aircraft gun in the distance – perfect for taking down airborne invaders. We've just read those sentences back and we're getting ourselves excited. Is it right to have a love for a piece of military hardware? Can we get a 'hell yeah'?



Use cover to hide from helicopters and get on that big 88.

JUICED

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Acclaim
DEVELOPER: Juice Games
WEB SITE: www.juicegames.com

GENRE
» RACING

NO. PLAYERS
» 1 x 1-2

TAKE NOTE:

_Ability to build racing crews that work together as a team to win races.

_Hundreds of authentic aftermarket parts from leading manufacturers.

_More than 50 licensed vehicles.

ANTICIPATION
10% 30% 50% 70% 80% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

Juiced is Juice Games' first non-mobile phone related game.

ALPHA

RELEASE DATE
SEPT 2004

BLINGIN' OR MINGIN'?

Some would just be happy with a bus pass, but there's an ever-growing number of you out there who aren't happy unless they have a car with a spoiler the size of the GWB. For those of you reading who were excited by the last sentence, then *Juiced* is for you. Offering an unprecedented level of automobile altering, *Juiced* will enable the player to change his car of choice from the colour right down to the necessary upgrades needed for street success. These will be available for purchase on the aftermarket, with parts coming from manufacturers such as APEXi. Blingin'!



The race isn't really won on the track, it's won in the garage. Apparently.



Rumours are abound that the player will be able to 'up' their car's level of 'shine'.

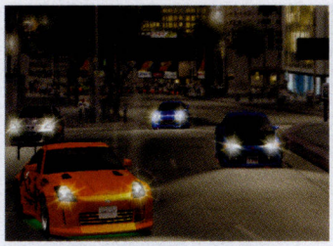


By the end of your fiddling you should be well able to bling your way to victory.





Wow! The cars even have those lights at the bottom to make it look the coolerest!



The red car and the blue car had a race... We will never tire of this caption. Ever.



The tracks look to have some extremely well-textured surfaces.



Wasn't this on the cover of *Need For Speed Underground*? Interesting.



The speedometer display does look fairly bland against the otherwise exciting visuals.

JUICED

THE FRENCH FOR VAVAVOOM? JUS, APPARENTLY

In real life, cars probably don't look as good as this. Playing Juiced at E3 was a minor revelation. Featuring a semi-cell-shaded look, Acclaim's new racer doesn't just have the looks though. Amongst all the now *de rigeur* customisation options are some serious performance mods. But let's go back a step first.

Despite its mediocrity, *Need For Speed Underground* sold well. So well that it has given developers and publishers alike the idea that there is a market for such a rude-boy appeasing, street-racing sub-genre. Enter *Juiced*, a game that looks set to attach itself to this newest of bandwagons with all the gusto of a joy-rider in Detroit. With over 50 licensed cars, an incredible amount of upgrade options and multiple gameplay modes, *Juiced*'s numbers alone will have *The Fast And The Furious* wannabes queuing up like 13 year old girls waiting for a Guy Sebastian concert.

Looking like it's got more pizzazz than a Gene Kelly routine, *Juiced* seems unlikely to disappoint in the graphics stakes come autumn but as Juice Games is keen to point out, with *Juiced* "style comes in a close second to speed" alluding to the fact that there's a lot more to this title than good physics, pretty pictures and oil changes.

For those of you who are merely visiting this planet on a reconnaissance mission before your kind harvest our souls for space-wars in your home galaxy, racing games are linear. They have to be – such is the nature of a racetrack – and that's fair enough, so when a game like *Juiced* purports to actually be a non-linear racing game we get slightly curious. As it turns out, the racetracks *will* be linear but the rest of the game won't be. Aspects of the game such as building characters, achieving notoriety and winning some bad guy's bucks will apparently bring with them said non-linear gameplay. Just exactly how they will, we're not sure. Yet.

Online racing is what the kids are all about these days though, and this is something that *Juiced* is prepared to deliver by the trunk load. Aside from the what-should-be-standard head-to-head online play, *Juiced* will actually give players the opportunity to develop their own racing crews through online communities with each member helping the other to be a lot more Vin Diesel than Paul Walker, which all makes this one a racing game we're going to keep at least one of our collective eyes on. ■

ONLINE RACING IS WHERE IT'S AT AND THIS IS SOMETHING THAT JUICED IS PREPARED TO DELIVER BY THE TRUNK LOAD

WHAT WE SAY »

THIS ONE'S CERTAINLY A RACING GAME WE'RE GOING TO KEEP AT LEAST ONE OF OUR COLLECTIVE EYES ON

"Juiced will give players the opportunity to go from artist to overdrive and test their mettle online."
Acclaim Press Release

« WHAT THEY SAY





Overtly-dazzling though it maybe, there's no denying the accuracy of the design.



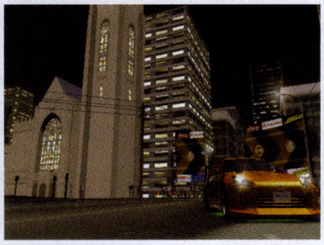
The racetrack/city streets look nice and broad, inviting lots of overtaking.



Presumably this will be the sort of car you start the game with. It is, after all, crap.



The cityscapes are looking impressive and should add to the atmosphere a great deal.



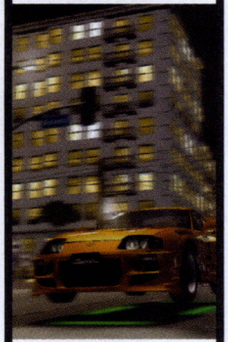
Thankfully, not all of the racing will be a nocturnal activity, like in certain, other games.



So people are actually willing to sponsor something this hideous? Weird.

FROM ONLY $100 ON THE ROAD

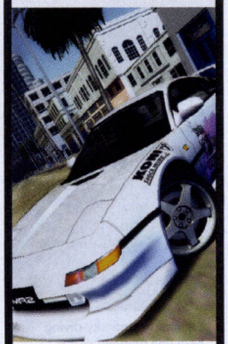
Juiced has some stiff competition in such an increasingly numbers-orientated genre, but by the looks of things it's gone all out to give itself the edge. 'How has it done this?' you ask. 'By having bigger numbers,' we cry. The most exciting of these lists, though, is probably the one that features more than 50 licensed vehicles. This particularly stellar list includes automobiles from motoring giants such as Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Dodge, Ford, Mazda Mitsubishi, Pontiac, Holden, Volkswagen, Fiat, Renault, Subaru, Peugeot and Chevrolet. Awesome.



The Toyota Supra looks to be the car that will appeal to all spoiler-lovers.



The Toyota Celica looks sleek, which sounds like Celica. So it makes sense.



The MR2 comes with shock absorbers. Hopefully, that means for colour choice.

COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Acclaim
DEVELOPER: BattleBorne Entertainment
WEB SITE: www.combatelitegame.com

GENRE » ACTION ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS » x 1-2

TAKE NOTE:

_Developer BattleBorne includes former members of the *Baldur's Gate*, *Fallout 2* and *Ghost Recon* teams.

_Includes two-player co-operative mode.

_Recreates famous battles such as D-Day and Bastogne.

ANTICIPATION 10% 30% 50% 70% 75% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

This is BattleBorne's first game on PS2, or any other format for that matter.

RELEASE DATE JULY 2004

COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS

YOUR CHANCE TO GO BEHIND ENEMY LINES

The sheer number of war games out there means that before long we'll have conceivably played through every significant battle and minor skirmish of every major war from either a first-person or third-person perspective. Finding a new angle is obviously increasingly tricky, however, that hasn't stopped BattleBorne from setting their first PS2 game in WWII. *Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers*, as the name less than subtlety gives away, is the paratroopers' story, with players taking part in some rather notable conflicts including those parachute-happy regiments.

Instead of taking a standard third or first-person shooter approach though, BattleBorne has drawn inspiration from the *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* and *Fallout* titles that key members of the development team previously worked on, creating something of an action RPG-cum-war game. As you can see from the screenshots, the action is viewed from an elevated over-head perspective, and from the early build we've seen, looks crisper and more detailed than *Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel*.

Combat Elite exudes that behind-enemy-lines feel, thanks in no small part to the fact that it recreates the likes of D-Day, Operation Market Garden and the defence of Bastogne. D-Day will be familiar to most thanks to the opening level of *Medal Of Honor Frontline*. Operation Market Garden and the defence of Bastogne, less so. So just to fill you in, Operation Market Garden consisted of thousands of paratroopers descending behind enemy lines to secure a series of bridges in Holland. The defence of Bastogne on the other hand, was conducted by light-infantry division: the 101st Airborne who defeated a superior armed German corps. What this means in terms of gameplay is that you should expect to be heavily outnumbered, which ties in beautifully with the character development and levelling up ethos of the *Baldur's Gate* and *Fallout* titles, which *Combat Elite* draws heavy inspiration from. Players will start out as a lowly Private with a puny punch, a lone rifle and very limited ammo, however, drilling the enemy full of bullet holes will be rewarded with experience points that can be spent on new abilities.

On top of simplistic and user-friendly controls and a cooperative two-player mode, *Combat Elite*'s obvious advantage over *Fallout* and *Baldur's Gate* is its historical setting. Ultimately *Combat Elite*'s success will boil down to whether it genuinely feels like a WWII game and not just an action RPG with WWII graphics bolted on. It was hard to make a definitive judgment from our limited play time at E3 but it's looking good and we sincerely hope it's the former. ■

MAKING UP THE NUMBERS

If you want loyalty, obedience or a player's attention, generous rewards are where it's at. Look at the RPG genre – many players are willing to comb even the most barren landscapes on the off chance that a sword of greater smiting proficiency lies hidden. According to Producer Eric DeMilt it's the reason for *Combat Elite*'s emphasis on character development. "Some of the game's elements such as the skill system, weapon pickups, and rank rewards are commonly seen in RPGs. We are using these elements because we feel it is important to reward the player and give them choices for their particular style of play."



Interacting with others will give a real feeling of immersion into the game's world.



Base RPG elements such as inventories will be common place throughout.



Equipping your sky-diving hero will demand some tactical thinking.

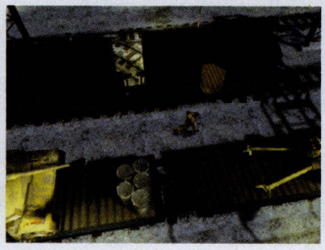




The detail in the environments is superb but what is that table doing there?



So sick of the snow were the residents that they had painted their floors to look like grass.



Curse these foreign train stations and their inability to correctly label the platforms.



The full level design should place vast demands on your navigation skills.



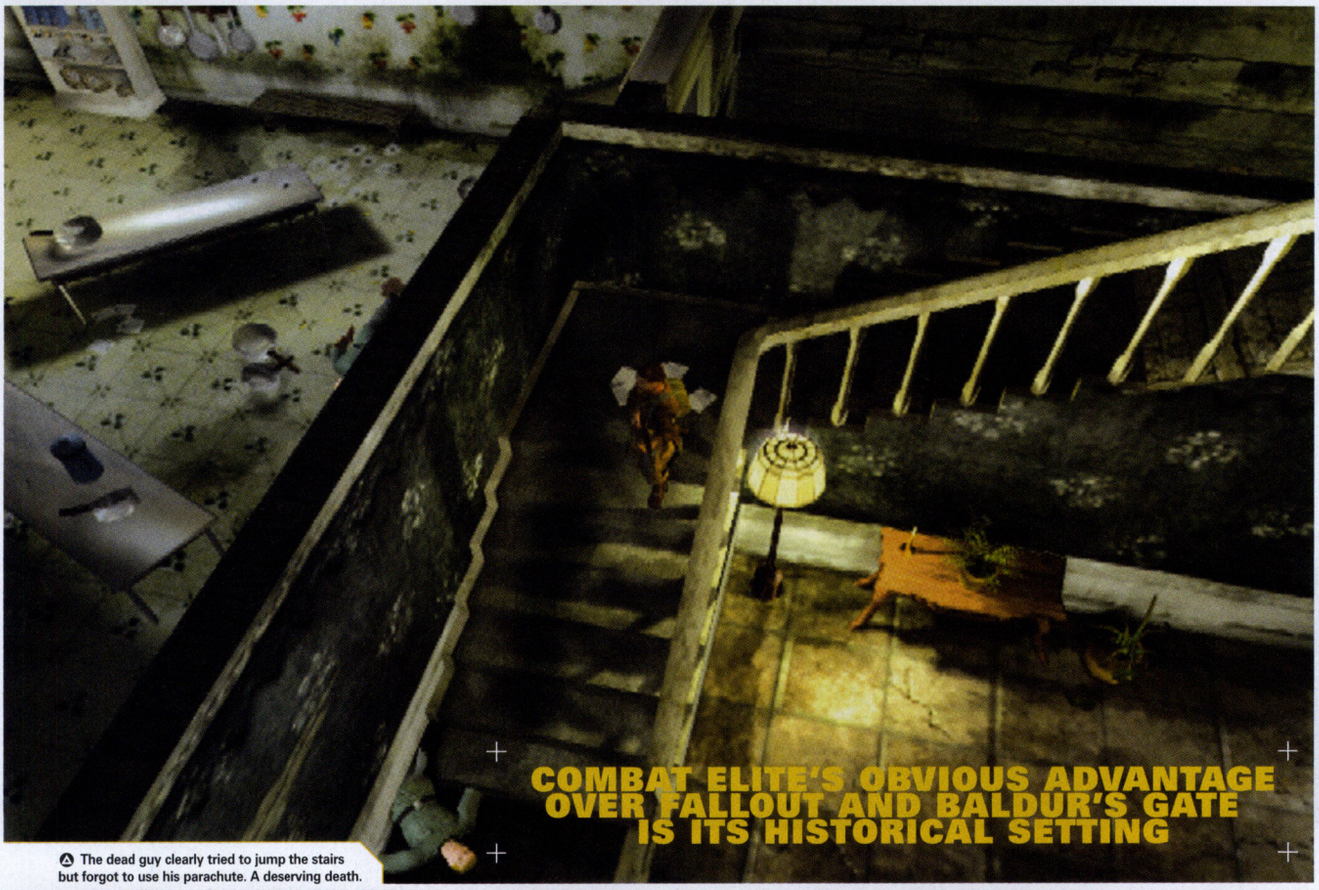
The gritty look of the game will certainly encourage some pretty cautious adventuring.

WHAT WE SAY »

ULTIMATELY COMBAT ELITE'S SUCCESS WILL BOIL DOWN TO WHETHER IT GENUINELY FEELS LIKE A WWII GAME AND NOT AN ACTION RPG WITH WWII GRAPHICS BOLTED ON

"Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers possesses the technology, graphics and gameplay to appeal to a broad global market."
Rod Cousens, CEO Acclaim

« WHAT THEY SAY



COMBAT ELITE'S OBVIOUS ADVANTAGE OVER FALLOUT AND BALDUR'S GATE IS ITS HISTORICAL SETTING

The dead guy clearly tried to jump the stairs but forgot to use his parachute. A deserving death.

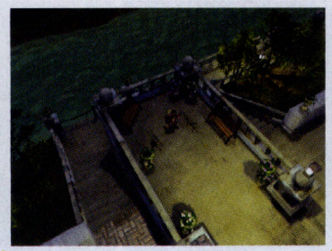




Why would anybody choose to run towards the part of a bridge that has just exploded?



There's nothing quite like a game that features a top-notch Persian rug.



We shall fight them on the seas, beaches and, apparently, the rather quaint balconies.



play™ does love WWII – we just never get tired of killing Nazis.



Wow. A snow level that actually has snow that looks like snow. Amazing.

Q+A



NAME
ERIC DELVILT

PRODUCER
BATTLEBORNE ENTERTAINMENT

A game such as *Combat Elite* is screaming out for an online mode. Will there be?
There is no online play planned for this version of *Combat Elite*. It is certainly something we are looking at for the sequel. You can take a look at *Champions Of Norrath* if you want to get a look at some of the engine's online capabilities. We are very excited about looking into this aspect of the game.

How does the co-op play work in terms of equipment available? Will a second player have to have played the game in order to introduce a powered up character, or is this something that has been addressed?
Two-player co-op works almost identically to single player. Each character starts out the game with certain equipment (based on who you choose), players must decide who gets what weapons, ammo and health as they find them playing through the game. It's pretty fun to run ahead of your friend and steal all his health and ammo pickups. Since we're not a pure RPG we do not support the importation of characters created in a single player game to a co-op game.

Are there any vehicles in the game that can be commandeered?
No, not in this version. You can blow them up, but you can't take them for a ride.

How does the enemy AI work considering the fixed and somewhat limited point of view?
From a functionality point of view, the AI system is very similar to that of most combat games. NPCs have paths, cover points, teams, combat movements, behaviours, and goals/priorities allowing us to set up a wide variety of battle scenarios. The enemy and allied AI actually work quite well in the CE POV. In many ways it's a lot better than a first-person view since you can see things going on all around you.

FAHRENHEIT: THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: VU Games
DEVELOPER: Quantic Dream
WEB SITE: www.fahrenheitgame.com

GENRE
» ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» x 1

TAKE NOTE:

_ Intriguing murder mystery.
_ Multiple controllable characters.
_ Impressive new 3D engine.

ANTICIPATION 10% 30% 50% 70% 75% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...
OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL — PC

ALPHA

RELEASE DATE
DEC 2004

CHILL OUT? US?

Since it released *Omikron: The Nomad Soul* in 1999, you could be forgiven for thinking Quantic Dream has been resting on its laurels, but this could not be further from the truth. The developer has actually spent the time developing its new graphics engine, known as ICE (for which fifteen people slaved tirelessly for over eighteen months), as well as a physical engine and the developer's very own AI routines. *Fahrenheit* will be the first title to be developed using these new tools and is said to offer impressive shadow-casting through specular lighting, including realtime self-shadowing on controllable characters. Sounds swanky...



The lighting effects against the Gothic architecture sure looks impressive.



Giant fleas? Random murders? Multiple characters? We can't wait...



Moody lighting will add to the intrigue of the Vivendi title.



This is Carla Valenti, just one of several controlled characters.





New York, 2005. *Fahrenheit*'s concept is certainly high on atmosphere.

FAHRENHEIT: THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

WE SAID, WHAT'S COOLER THAN BEING COOL?

In a near-future New York, ravaged by cold and isolated by snowdrifts, apparently 'normal' citizens are randomly killing total strangers. Inexplicably, despite there being no link between murderers and victims, all the crimes seem to share the same *modus operandi*. So reads the premise for Quantic Dreams' *Fahrenheit*, a sleuthing adventure which promises to define "a whole new gender of game type". How will it do this exactly? Well, it seems that the *Fahrenheit* game engine will require the gamer to switch between control of multiple players in order to unravel the mystery, including Lucas Kane (a suspect himself, having just murdered a man in a restaurant men's room) as well as police inspectors Carla Valenti and Tyler Miles.

The difference Quantic Dream promises over similarly-themed adventure titles however, is that the actions of the player when in control of one character will have a direct effect upon the situational response and actions of a different player later on – in short, the game's plot will react according to how you play the game. Rumours that *Fahrenheit* will ship chapter-by-chapter (possibly as an online-purchased title) have proved to be false, but on the strength of these shots we're hoping to be impressed by Quantic's self-developed ICE graphics engine at the very least. ■









TIM BURTON'S THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Buena Vista
DEVELOPER: Capcom
WEB SITE: www.capcom-europe.com

GENRE
» ACTION ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» x1

TAKE NOTE:

- License still popular despite being a decade on from the film's release.
- Fast-paced platforming fun.
- Whether or not the songs will be included is still unconfirmed.

ANTICIPATION
10% 30% 50% 70% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

MAXIMO VS THE ARMY OF ZIN	85%
ONIMUSHA 3	84%

ALPHA

RELEASE DATE
TBA 2004



Fifteen years of Art school between us and we still can't draw stick-men this well.



The environments retain the cold quirkiness that served the film so delightfully.

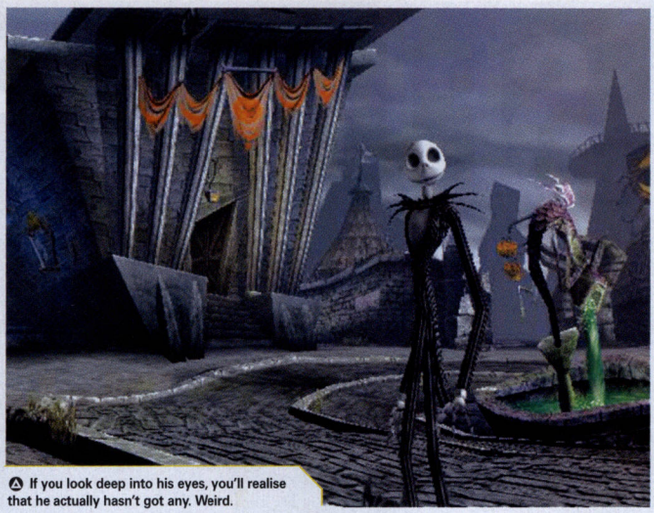


The game does feature a rather mouthy bunch of characters.



The film was actually based on a vision Tim Burton had after eating a rotten pumpkin.





If you look deep into his eyes, you'll realise that he actually hasn't got any. Weird.

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

BOYS AND GIRLS OF EVERY AGE, WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO SEE SOMETHING STRANGE?

Ten years might seem like a long time between a film's cinema release and its licensed game tie-in but in truth, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* merchandise wagon never really picked up speed until a few years later anyway. Now you can get all kinds of goodies, from books to action figures. But then, with Rockstar developing *The Warriors* and EA having got its hands on *The Godfather*, it would seem that a classic license is never too dated to milk it for a few more of your hard-earned dollars.

But enough with the cynical sideswipes (for now, at least), as on early evidence *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is looking to be a surprisingly sophisticated adventure, in which Pumpkin King Jack Skellington must take on that evil sack-of-bugs named Oogie Boogie for the sake of Hallowe'en Town. Nearly all the film's mini-sets have been rendered in painstaking detail, and the speed and flow of Jack's gestures and expressions manage to effortlessly recall the unbridled joy of the movie. So providing that Capcom doesn't take too many liberties with the license, this should be one beloved property that doesn't get the short thrift when it comes to videogame translation. ■

MASTER OF FRIGHT, DEMON OF LIGHT

Jack Skellington is the Pumpkin King, and any readers familiar with his adventure in Christmas Town will already know what a formidable character he is, despite an esoteric, stick-thin posture. Indeed, with a wave of his hand and a well-placed moan he has swept the very bravest off their feet (or so he sang). At no point in the film did Jack wield some sort of whip-cum-lariat/rubber bogey monster-slaying device in order to assert his authority over his domain. Frankly, this worries us slightly, but we're prepared to give the benefit of the doubt until we see the weapon in full platforming action.



The whip-bogey didn't feature in the film but it certainly doesn't feel tonally out of place.

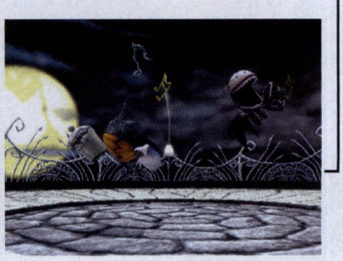


Despite the whip, it seems very few liberties have been taken with the license.









SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-house
WEB SITE: www.splintercell.com

GENRE
» ACTION ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» x 1-4

TAKE NOTE:

- Refined control system enabling a smoother operation all round.
- New moves for Sam Fisher because an old dog can learn new, if needless, tricks..
- Music by Lalo *'Dirty Harry'* Schifrin.

ANTICIPATION
10% 30% 52% 70% 84% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

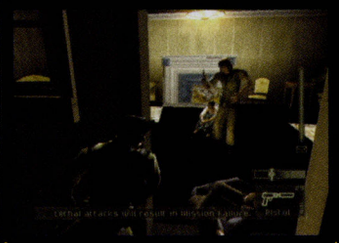
SPLINTER CELL	83%
RAINBOW SIX 3	87%

BETA

RELEASE DATE
JULY 2004



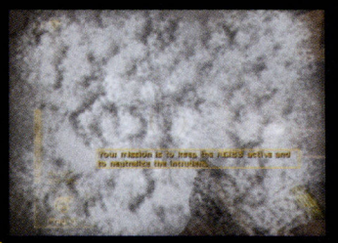
Multiplayer: hacking a door lock will trigger an alarm so get ready to hide back in the shadows



Most games keep you away from the main villain until the end. This is level one, and there he is.



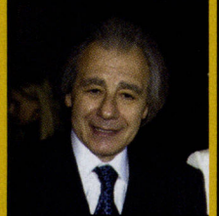
Do not adjust your magazine, these heat effects are intentional and pretty as a young girl's smile.



Don't shoot an extinguisher or you'll get blinded by foam. Hey, it's just like Saturday morning kids-TV!

IMMENSLEY TALENTED, ARGENTINIAN BORN PIANIST...

Starsky And Hutch, Enter The Dragon, Mission: Impossible, Dirty Harry – four films that shy away from using more than one adjective noun/verb noun combinations. And film's that have had their music scored by Lalo Schifrin. *Pandora Tomorrow*'s musical score is simply wonderful and manages to sound modern while still having a classical edge. One level sees you in a sewer as water drips around you. As you progress this sound will stop sounding like an effect and become part of the music – its natural beat becoming the beat for something epic.



Here's Lalo Schifrin. No doubt he's thinking of a score to this screenshot.

SPLINTER CELL: PAN

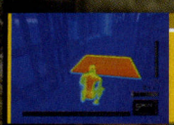
A TOAST TO GOOD STEALTH

Crouching in a cape of shadow, pistol raised, silent and deadly. Crosshairs scale down, denoting the accuracy of the shot. The target's head ready for a bullet. Squeeze the trigger. Phut! Miss. Certain members of **play**™'s team found the original *Splinter Cell* to be thirsty for some accuracy in the weapons department. *Pandora Tomorrow* improves on the original in many ways and not least because Sam Fisher's sidearm comes with a laser sight that you can toggle. It's deadly. As in life, where the red dot illuminates, a bullet would follow. So why not just uses the laser sight all the time if aiming by eye takes about 38 shots too many? Because the enemy can see the sparkling crimson dot. Should it flick across a surface in front of them they'll see it – and depending on their alert status, they will react to it. You can use this to your advantage. You can use the light to distract them, then move by or kill 'em while they're all confused. Lovely. It's just lovely.

Hands-on testing, that's what we've got here and what we can tell you straight off is that the control system has been greatly improved while the graphics have had a polish. *Pandora Tomorrow* – it's like the first game but better! No, you're right – that would make an awful advert. But at least the advert would be totally accurate. Where the original often felt awkward to control we now have something far more intuitive that makes for far smoother and slicker stealth action. You can click down on the analog sticks to make Sam Fisher look using binoculars and to get his back up against the wall while all weapon and system management has been rejigged to allow you to react quicker. There are other



» MOTION DETECT
Multiplayer: If something moves and it's dark, you'll want a motion detector. Movement is shown by the reticle on the detector.



» RIDE THE THERMAL
Mines now show up when heat vision is used. Hot mines? Ask no question, do your job – you can be replaced y'know.



WHISTLE «
Guards have three stages of alert, each stage will cause them to wear more armour and become even more aware.

CAT

- New and improved graphics!
- New moves including a jump from the once static split-jump. He can also whistle.
- Lalo Schifrin is kewl!



MOUSE

- To much reliance on night vision thereby negating the graphics.
- No need for new moves.
- Trial and error gameplay.





Locks are picked using the analog stick. It worked well for the first game, same here.



Night vision: this scene is in total darkness enabling you to confuse the enemy by whistling.



Lighting effects dominate and many a time you'll stop just to go, 'aw'. Grow up, you sap.



Binoculars now come as standard, giving you a working first-person view any time you want.

DORA TOMORROW

new moves, but as with the first game, their implementation is somewhat limited. Before you could jump up and support yourself in mid-air by pressing your legs out against supporting walls. Now you can lean to one side and propel yourself up onto a ledge on the opposite wall. While we welcome the new addition to the split-jump we also note that you only need to use it twice to complete the game. This was always *Splinter Cell*'s problem; it gives you moves that you seldom or never use. Sure, you can hang upside down from a cross beam with your gun aimed and ready, but you never need too. There's never those 'thank the Lord I can hang upside down!' moments. They don't happen. Still, you do look cool and sometimes that's enough.

When directing our attention to the improved visuals we noticed something that was true with the first game. This game looks beautiful and crisp with a great deal of definition and detail on display, but you'll only notice if you're not using night vision and you use night vision a lot. Often we'll find that the only time we turn it off is when we're reminded that we really should we paying respect to the title's graphics. Where the original's PS2 version looked slightly jaggier when compared to its Xbox mother, *Pandora*'s are smoother and far more comparable. It's a testament to the their quality that we only noticed major differences in quality when checking out thermal vision or condition's where the lighting technology is tested to the maximum. Ubisoft Shanghai has done us proud so we'll forgive them for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and move onto some real changes.

ANY GAME THAT HAS A MICROPHONE-BULLET DESERVES MAXIMUM ANTICIPATION

Online multiplayer. Trust us – it really is the future. *Pandora Tomorrow*'s multiplayer mode really is different. Instead of simply giving you the single player game where artificial intelligence is replaced by something more deadly, it gives you a whole new game of hide and seek. Only four players can play at once and they're spilt into two teams. One team play the spies, the other two take the triggers of mercenaries. The spies are designed for stealth, the mercenaries for a more direct approach and it's the difference between the character's skills that gives you your thrills. By keeping in the shadows and disabling alarms and cameras you must get your spy to steal an item protected by the mercs. These mercs control more like standard first-person characters, the spies, like Sam Fisher. It should be a turkey shoot, but it isn't. Spies work well in darkness, mercs can only see what's lit by the tactical light on their assault rifles, or than they can switch to motion detection mode where any difference in air pressure is highlighted on screen. If a spy moves slowly they're pretty much invisible, and they do have the added ability of night vision. Problem is that the mercenaries have a vision mode that detects electromagnetic energy. Switch on any electronic equipment and you'll light up as if you'd been drinking blue Ready Brek. It's this balancing of skills and abilities that makes the resultant game of cat and mouse so compelling. Hell, any game where you can shoot an enemy with a eavesdropping microphone-bullet deserves maximum anticipation. ■

DILATED PUPILS

If your pupils are fat and dilated, you're either on drugs, making whoopee or it's dark. You'll notice that when you travel from a light area into a dark one, it will take a while for your eyes to adjust. SAS soldiers walk at night with one eye closed just in case they see a flash their night vision won't be totally goofed. They'll always have one eye ready to see in almost total darkness. *Splinter Cell 2*'s online multiplayer mode obeys these rules. If you're a mercenary and you've been hunting for a spy in a bright room it will take you a while to see properly when you enter a dark one. Similarly, dark spaces will look all the darker if juxtaposed against a bright window. The balancing of skills continues and we're more than impressed.



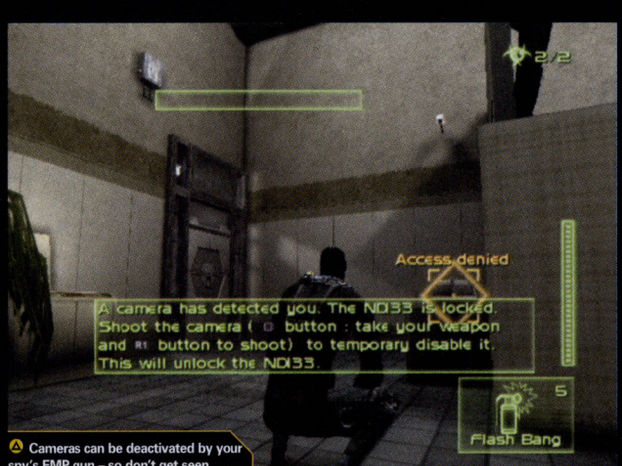
Moving from light areas to dark will cause your eyes to adjust.



Just because you're in the dark doesn't mean they won't look with torches.



No dull training levels here. Sam trains on the job.



Cameras can be deactivated by your spy's EMP gun – so don't get seen.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

TIME
55 SECS

Graphics noticeably improved – controls are frickn' sweeeeet.

TIME
10 MINS

Level one is an 'on the job' training mission. No dumb ass obstacle courses this time.

TIME
03 HRS

Why it plays like the original – but in a sexier, more refined way.

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-house
WEB SITE: www.psiopsgame.com

GENRE
» ACTION ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» 1 x

TAKE NOTE:

- Uses the Havok 2 physics engine made famous by *Max Payne 2*.
- Fire actually spreads across surfaces like fire should.
- Four different Psi-powers.

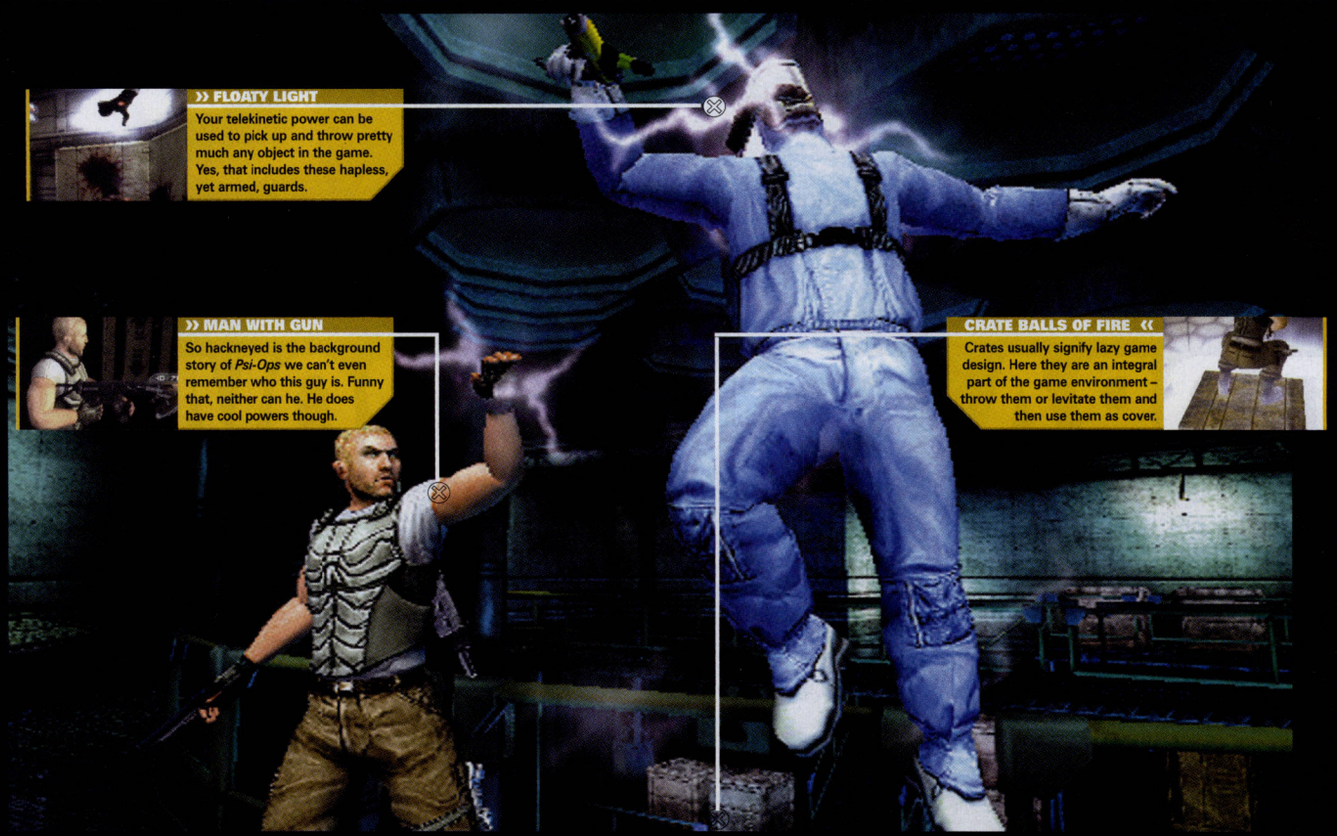
ANTICIPATION
10% 30% 50% 70% 81% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...

MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE 84%
SPYHUNTER 2 36%

BETA

RELEASE DATE
SEPT 2004



» FLOATY LIGHT
Your telekinetic power can be used to pick up and throw pretty much any object in the game. Yes, that includes these hapless, yet armed, guards.

» MAN WITH GUN
So hackneyed is the background story of *Psi-Ops* we can't even remember who this guy is. Funny that, neither can he. He does have cool powers though.

CRATE BALLS OF FIRE «
Crates usually signify lazy game design. Here they are an integral part of the game environment – throw them or levitate them and then use them as cover.

MIND OVER MATTER

At the core of *Psi-Ops*' gameplay are the excellent psychic powers. Assigned to the four directions on the d-pad, each one is limited to the amount of psi-power (think health bar) your character has. How you use them is up to you – different powers *could* be used in different situations, depending on how you want to approach the game. For example, it might be a good idea to possess a guard and then use him to short out an electrical floor before you walk on it, equally, you may opt to stand on a crate and then levitate it, taking yourself and the crate over the obstacle.



Pyro: Shoot fire out of your hand. Very powerful – burns stuff, you know.



Telekinesis: Most objects, including humans, can be lifted and thrown.



Remote viewing: See what's in the next room by projecting your, er, soul?



Mind control: Take control of an enemy and use him. Brilliant stuff.

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

THINK OF A GAME, THINK OF ANY GAME

Most of the time, like you, our first impressions of a game are formed on the first handful of screens we see or the first piece of artwork that lands in the **play**™ inbox. If first impressions did indeed last then Midway's *Psi-Ops* would probably be consigned to **play**™'s 'Yeah, whatever' bin FOR ALL ETERNITY. (Note to all games publishers' PRs: no such bin does or will ever exist in or around the **play**™ offices. Really.) The artwork was crude (think HSC standard here) and the first batch of screens depicted a generic-looking man with a gun (nice one) waving his hand around supposedly exercising his 'amazing' psychic powers. What a great concept for a game – it's bound to be rubbish! Even the game's original name, 'ESP-ionage' (word-play fans), was enough to make us choke on our breakfast flapjacks.

Good job that first impressions often turn out to be completely misplaced then, eh? Now we've played *Psi-Ops* we can tell you that, well, it's looking pretty damn good – we know this because it makes us ask the question: why has no one thought of doing this before?

The premise of *Psi-Ops* is pretty straightforward. You play a special agent (of the kind who has lost his memory) who has been highly trained in the arts of mind powers and as you progress through the game you regain (or remember, if you like) your powers. These are, specifically, shooting fire out of the hand, levitating (and throwing) objects and people, remote viewing and, best of all, mind control. These four, and the obligatory



Man backed up against crate holding a gun. Some elements of *Psi-Ops* hurt. Awfully.



Excellent gameplay idea #1. Stand on box, levitate box to get to new areas. Super.



Secret bases always look like warehouses in these games. It's all very Bauhaus.



Blow these cannisters up with guards next to them and they'll burn – the fire will spread, too.

LEVITATE

- Features cool psychic powers for doing cool psychic stuff with.
- Refreshingly open-ended gameplay that accommodates the USP well.
- The game looks lurvely.



LAVITATE

- Features **play**™'s least favourite type of hero – a man with a gun.
- Hackneyed plot that undermines the game's innovation.
- Midway published *SpyHunter2*.





Excellent gameplay idea #3. Levitate a bad dude and throw him, 10 pin bowling style, into his buddies. Strike!



This is Nick Scryer. He has psi-powers and probably the worst name ever. Ever.



shooting and stealth, form the basis for all gameplay in *Psi-Ops*.

Remote viewing enables you to see what's ahead of you through walls and doors and plan what you're going to do next. Shooting fire, well, enables you to set fire to things (indeed, fire will spread on combustible surfaces such as crates and humans). Levitation enables the movement of any object within a certain size, including barrels and enemies. Finally, mind control enables you to take control of an enemy and then use him to shoot other enemies, activate switches, take out electrified flooring or just simply to 'dispose' of himself. The latter is only possible if your victim is unaware of your presence, bringing in some much-needed (!) stealth elements.

What we had feared with *Psi-Ops* was that the use of each of these powers was to be dictated to the player by the game's designers. In other words, each puzzle or part of the game could only be solved in the way they'd designed it. Not so. The choice, as they say, is entirely yours.

Each power encourages a different style of play – do you sneak up to a guard, possess him and then attempt to kill off his fellow guards knowing that if they discover you, they'll give your in-limbo body a good beasting? Do you lob explosive barrels in their direction, the resulting impact and explosion causing the whole troop to catch alight? Do you levitate the guards one by one, shooting them in the air as they squirm? Or do you indeed run in head first, shooting fire and bullets into the pack?

Your psionic powers can also be used to directly aid you – standing on a crate and then levitating it can be a method to traverse a gap in a bridge, for example, or as a shield against enemy fire. The scope of *Psi-Ops* is huge. Potentially. The only real problem we can see at this stage is the use of a psionic meter– the more powerful the ability, the quicker the meter drops. It can be replenished by either (yawn) picking up the odd psi-power-up here and there or (more interestingly) by absorbing the psi-power directly from corpses and the living. We'll have to wait and see as to exactly how this might or might not adversely affect the gameplay and ruin your fun with the psi-powers.

There's not much else wrong with *Psi-Ops*. The camera needs a bit of work – using the telekinesis psi-power switches the right analogue stick from camera control to object control – causing the camera to get stuck on corners and the like. Apart from that it's pretty sound. At this (fairly) early stage, the game hangs together well – there's plenty of chance for you to play with the powers, the physics engine is great, *Psi-Ops* has good level and character design and you can even kick the hell out of dead bodies (oh yes). Well, we're very pleasantly surprised.

Hey, this is **play**™, the magazine that's big enough to admit when it's wrong. From now on we'll be keeping a keen eye on *Psi-Ops* – it could be the surprise hit of the year. ■

FROM NOW ON WE'LL BE KEEPING A KEEN EYE ON PSI-OPS – IT COULD BE THE SURPRISE HIT OF THE YEAR

PLAYTIME

Here's a good example of how much fun *Psi-Ops*' physics engine makes the game. Included in the demo we play is this 'psychic playroom' full of crates stacked on top of one another, steel balls, barrels, explosives and mindless guards. WE NEVER TIRED OF THROWING THE GUARDS AROUND. Like life-size rag-dolls in the midst of a terrifying storm we were hurling them around, into crates, barrels and then setting them on fire and hurling them around, into crates, barrels... And all on PS2 – very, very impressive indeed.



The blood splats are the floating guy's friends. Hehehehehe.



Giant steel ball + psi-powers x faceless enemies = fun. If only other games were so good at maths.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

TIME 50 SECS

Good grief. Look at that awful artwork on the loading screen.

TIME 12 MINS

Weeeeeee! We're in the practice room playing with a giant ball! Look at the physics, isn't it brilliant!

TIME 01 HRS

Okay enough play, time to get down to the serious business of, erm, playing. We're possessing guards, burning stuff, throwing explosives all over the shop. This rocks!



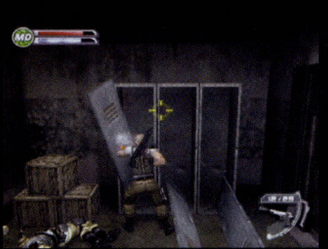
Excellent gameplay idea #2. Levitate gas cylinders, shoot them in mid air to kill enemies.



Because of *Psi-Ops*' Havok physics engine, balancing on floating platforms is tough.



Dead guys can be drained for a small amount of psi-power with live ones giving up more.



Search the lockers for power ups: health packs and psi-power-replenishers. Woo-hoo!

HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Amuze
WEB SITE: www.sega-europe.com

GENRE
» ACTION ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» 1 x 1

TAKE NOTE:

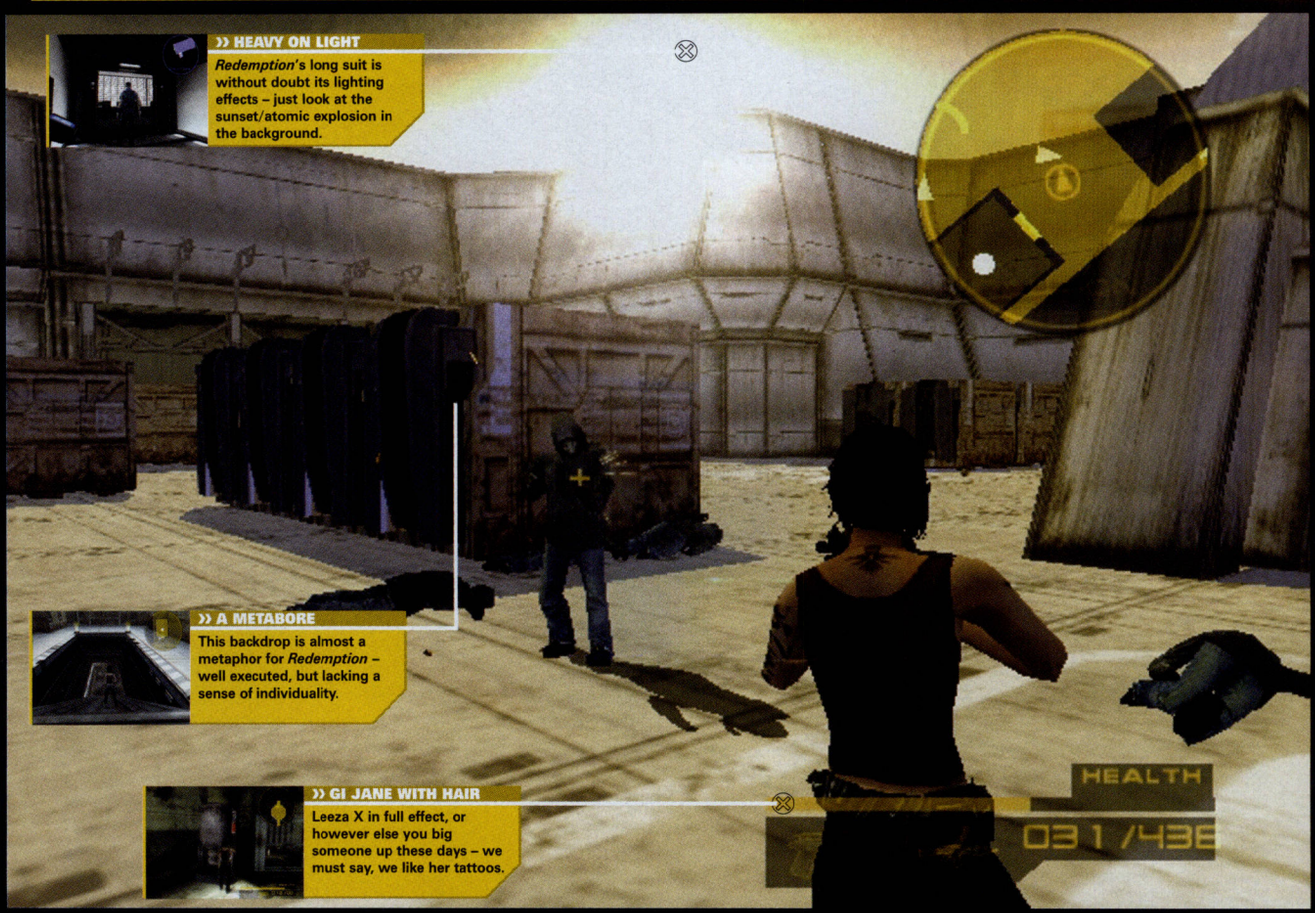
- Two playable characters – Leeza X and an aged Jack Wade.
- Orchestral Score from the award-winning Richard Jacques.
- Jack still sounds like Clint Eastwood swallowing gravel.

ANTICIPATION 69%
10% 30% 52% 70% 90%

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT YOU...
HEADHUNTER 75%

BETA

RELEASE DATE
AUTUMN 2004



» HEAVY ON LIGHT
Redemption's long suit is without doubt its lighting effects – just look at the sunset/atomic explosion in the background.

» A METABORE
This backdrop is almost a metaphor for *Redemption* – well executed, but lacking a sense of individuality.

» GI JANE WITH HAIR
Leeza X in full effect, or however else you big someone up these days – we must say, we like her tattoos.

HEALTH
031/438

HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION

JACK WADE RETURNS, BUT IS IT A THIRD-PERSON SHOOTER TOO FAR?

"You've got to yourself one question: Do I feel lucky?"

When it comes to predicting how Amuze's *HeadHunter: Redemption* is going to turn out we feel a little like the guy staring the down the barrel of a Magnum .44 brandished by Dirty Harry himself, unsure of whether the gravel-voiced cop has fired six shots or only five.

"Well do ya, punk?"

Not really, no.

While the original *HeadHunter* successfully combined elements of *Metal Gear Solid*, *Driver*, *Resident Evil* and *Robocop* to create a distinctive and atmospheric adventure fronted by gaming's answer to Harry Calahan, Jack Wade, its sequel has scrapped the somewhat skittish, yet at times exciting, bike sections of the original and we're a little concerned that the series' zeitgeist cool has gone with it. At a time when *Grand Theft Auto* and *Driv3r* are the hot franchises and *Splinter Cell* has raised the bar for stealth-based gameplay we feel more than a little apprehensive that *Redemption* is going to end up a little like Jack Wade himself – older, more grizzled and sporting a limp.

Emphasis is now firmly placed on the third-person action levels, which exude the same futuristic, dystopian feel as the first game and are interspersed with similar ironic media broadcasts, but while Amuze isn't quite whistling *Hit The Road Jack*, it is

NOTHING WITHOUT A WOMAN OR A GIRL

Redemption takes place twenty years after the first *HeadHunter* and a lot's happened since then. Firstly, poor old Jack's son gets snatched. Then his wife Angela Stern promptly leaves him and inherits the family company which she rules with an iron fist, determined to bring about a crime-free society – even if it means utilising a little slave labour.

Then on a routine mission, Jack kills the father of a six-year-old girl, a scared, vulnerable child that's later reintroduced to us as the headstrong and sassy Leeza X. With an embittered ex-wife and a crime-fighting partner whose father he killed, Jack may well be in store for more than a few woman problems.



Leeza took it upon herself to up the ante on the old 'stab them in the back' routine



Will Leeza still be prepared to work for Jack when she discovers he killed her dad?



If *Minority Report* didn't exist, those mechanical spiders would be a new idea.



Stealth takes on a whole new perspective when you can see through walls.



Holding the gun reminded Leeza of what it felt like to love a man.



The range of high-tech weaponry on offer is enough to slake the thirst of any gun fetishist.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

- Aiming and scanning systems show off a few innovations.
- Some rather nice lighting and particle effects in there.
- Features a large arsenal.

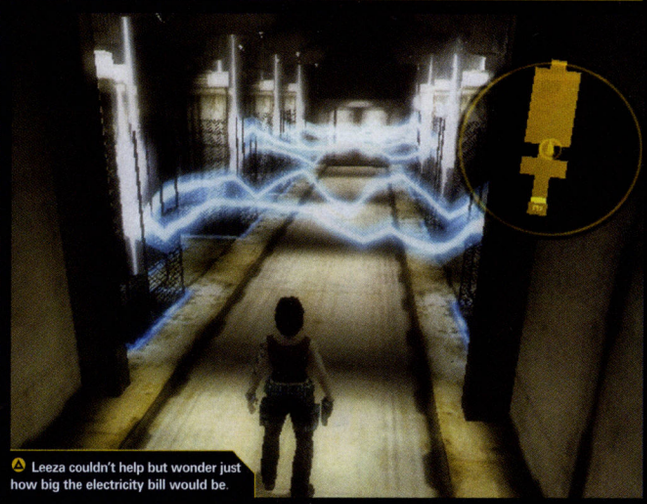


MASTER OF NONE

- The motorbike sections have been axed.
- Leeza X's ridiculous name.
- Jack looks like he's ready for the old people's home.







Leeza couldn't help but wonder just how big the electricity bill would be.

definitely gearing up our man for retirement or the knackers yard, as for much of *Redemption* you'll be getting to grips with a new heroine – the very So Solidly named Leeza X. Ms X behaves in a remarkably similar way to Jack, the difference between them being pretty much cosmetic – she sports a graceful kick animation, while Jack cracks jaws with a manly hook.

Thankfully there are a few slightly more pronounced innovations thrown in too, namely a refined aiming system and a scanning device, disguised as a pair of natty Oakley-style shades for identifying threats, switches and the like. The former development is a fresh expansion of traditional lock-on systems, but instead of snapping onto a potential victim with all the accuracy of an inhuman sniper, players have to take into account their distance from a target, angle and speed at which they're moving – running and firing wildly contributes to an erratically moving reticle. A more unhurried approach, however, provides less twitchy control, allowing for localised shots on different parts of the body, which of course, facilitates the ever-popular headshot.

It's the scanner, however, that has the potential to elevate *HeadHunter* above the crowd. An underground sewer section we played through – wait, it gets better, we promise – demonstrated how intrinsic it is for success. An early warning rumble through the DualShock revealed that a potential danger was nearby in a seemingly innocuous section of pipe. Throwing caution to the wind at this point would have resulted in Jack permanently losing the use of both his legs, unwittingly stepping on a series of mines. Paying heed to the early alert and activating the scanner revealed the presence of the mines, which were safely disposed of from a distance. Actually, we're embellishing facts here – first time through, Jack met an untimely, mine-triggered demise, proving how essential the scanner is.

The build of *Redemption* we played still had a little way to go before being complete – enemy AI was not fully functional, with enemy soldiers unable to cope with running up stairs without losing all cognitive ability. We also haven't been privy to witnessing many of the game's levels, however, rather disconcertingly, the few we have seen impart a horrible feeling of déjà vu for anyone that's played the original, with a *Running Man*-style TV show and rooftop boss showdown eerily familiar. Thankfully though, *Redemption* has certainly been spruced up visually, giving off an air of quality on a par with *Hitman Contracts*. In fact, like the latest *Hitman* instalment, *Redemption* features similarly lovely lighting and particle effects, particularly evident in Jack's basement HQ where shafts of light reveal thick clouds of dust lingering in the air – locations are atmospheric all right. Speaking of which, Richard Jacques is once again on board to provide *HeadHunter*'s musical score, probably meaning orchestras aplenty, but if it's one thing Mr Jacques can do it's add a touch of aural drama when needed.

There's no doubt that presentation-wise *Redemption* is looking promising, however, with the likes of *Vice City*, *Driv3r*, *Hitman Contracts* and *Splinter Cell* all taking the third-person adventure in their own unique direction, Amuze's Jack of all trades approach – plenty of shooting, a touch of stealth, a few puzzles here and there – might end up spreading the innovation a little too thin across the board.

"But I gots to know!"

Sadly we won't know the contents of *HeadHunter*'s barrel until we sit down with the finished code, but we're hoping there's a bullet left in there to surprise us. ■

IT'S THE SCANNER, HOWEVER, THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO ELEVATE HEADHUNTER ABOVE THE CROWD



There is no denying the wealth of visual panache to be found in *Redemption*.



That radar indicates the presence of three enemies. Admiring the rockface is a real mistake.



After killing men, Leeza X likes to mark the event by doing a cartwheel. Weeeeeeeee!



Leeza X was hardly surprised at the size of Microsoft's latest videogames console.

BARRELS OF GUNS

When you're previewing a game set in a near-future metropolis and you've already detailed in depth the new aiming and scanning systems, there's only one thing left to talk about – the guns. And **play**™ would never scrape that barrel. If it's one thing that's painfully obvious, it's that by ditching *HeadHunter*'s bike sections, Amuze has left us with painfully little that's unique to talk about, which doesn't exactly bode well for the final game.



Despite looking like every other 'hero' of recent years, Jack looks pretty suave here.



A warehouse, an enemy, some leaning against walls. It doesn't exactly scream 'new.'

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

TIME 39 SECS

Leeza X hey? Tragic name, but she kicks like a mule.

TIME 15 MINS

That scanning's pretty useful you know – better than being blown limb from limb at any rate.

TIME 02 HRS

We've seen a few levels now and some of them seem very familiar indeed. Not good.

Jak 3 AND Ratchet & Clank 3

THIS YEAR'S SEXIEST FOURSOME: MAN, ROBOT, LOMBAX... WHAT ON EARTH IS DAXTER, ANYWAY?





The *Jak II* graphics engine has been given a severe overhaul between adventures, and now features more glossy effects than ever before, as well as some seriously high-detail environments to explore.



The lightning feature is just one of the many effective gun upgrades available.



Naturally, *Jak 3* continues the series' tradition of combining lots of different gameplay elements.

NAUGHTY DOG'S JAK AND DAXTER AND INSOMNIAC'S RATCHET & CLANK SERIES HAVE NEVER BEEN 'AVERAGE' JUMPING GAMES



As always, everything depicted in *Ratchet & Clank* is larger than life, and very, very shiny.



New for *Ratchet 3* is the light refracting weapon. Use it to deflect light into switches and enemies.

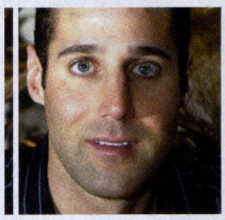


These bad guys are said to be the stupidest in the universe – so stupid, in fact, that they'll happily join a crusade to eradicate all life form the universe – including themselves.

THE PLAYERS

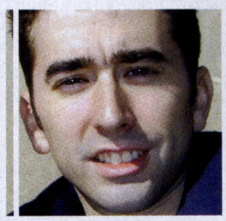
WHO ARE THE CREATIVE MINDS BEHIND JAK 3 AND RATCHET & CLANK 3?

NAME: JASON RUBIN
TITLE: DEPARTING CEO NAUGHTY DOG



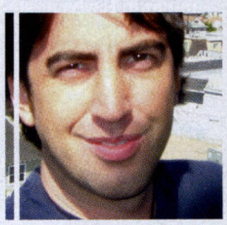
Jason created the *Jak And Daxter* franchise, though he admits to have felt like a fifth wheel in recent times, as the developer has expanded and developed around him. When announcing *Jak 3*, Rubin was keen to emphasise that this instalment belongs to Evan Wells and that his input has been merely supervisory this time around.

NAME: EVAN WELLS
TITLE: GAME DIRECTOR NAUGHTY DOG



One of the most candid men in videogame development, Evan Wells has inherited the *Jak* franchise after five years of commitment to the property. Despite *Jak 3* being the final part of the current trilogy, we will see Jak and Daxter in other games in the future, as Naughty Dog seeks to expand upon its universe even further.

NAME: BRIAN ALLGEIER
TITLE: DESIGN DIRECTOR INSOMNIAC



Allgeier has been the controlling force behind *Ratchet & Clank* since the series began and has overseen the title's evolution (and its seven subsequent Game Of The Year awards for *Locked And Loaded*). A man who wears his work ethic on his sleeve, Allgeier is quick to relate the game's success back to Insomniac's independent roots.

The career of a platform-adventure videogame character is often pretty much a one-note affair, throughout which the wheres and whys of each successive adventure are ignored by a developer in favour of mindless jumping for jumping's sake. You don't ask questions – there's a princess in peril, a civilization in chaos, a treasure to collect – and each generically-themed world becomes merely another obstacle ahead of ultimate gaming success. Hell, even Mario had to save Daisy from Donkey Kong and Bowser a few times before graduating from medical school and earning himself a driving license.

Just take a look yourself – for a console as pervasive as PlayStation2, there are actually very few triple-A platform licenses to choose from, with even such trustworthy luminaries as *Tomb Raider* and *Castlevania* unable to keep up with the expensive development chase. Sure, the environments have become prettier and larger, but there are very few games that have sustained a connection beyond their ability to make you chuckle or gasp sporadically – what do you *really* care to know about *Whiplash*'s Spanx and Redmond, or even Lady Croft for that matter?

This lack of connection to character or narrative could account for why we've come to expect less and less from action/platform games in the last few years, and why a platform adventure with any special qualities stands out from the pack quite so boldly. You certainly wouldn't expect to see the phrase 'narrative trilogy' or 'online and split-screen multiplayer' in any average platform franchise's grubby, yawnsome press release. But then, Naughty Dog's *Jak And Daxter* series and Insomniac's *Ratchet & Clank* franchise have never been 'average' jumping games – otherwise they certainly wouldn't have shifted over ten million units between them with their first two chapters.

As ongoing series, both titles are testament to Sony's continued pledge to support innovation, and from the display at the sumptuous London hotel where both games are being unveiled to **play**™'s freelance correspondent, you could be forgiven for thinking that the third instalments in both sagas are an in-house development. In reality, Insomniac is one of only two independent developers in the current top fifty listing, while Naughty Dog created *Crash Bandicoot* for PSone and hasn't looked back since. Two very different pedigrees, for sure, but the goal of both companies remains the same – to provide a gaming experience which cannot be obtained with any other PS2 title; it's a measure of both games' successes that Sony would choose to showcase *Jak 3* and *Ratchet & Clank 3* side by side, certain that neither one will be left holding the spotlight exclusively after curtain call.

Of course, fans who have followed either saga will be eager to discover »

JAK 3

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Naughty Dog
WEB SITE: www.scea.com

GENRE
» ACTION ADVENTURE

NO. PLAYERS
» x 1

ALPHA *Jak 3* begins with Haven City being razed to the ground following all the Dark Eco chaos toward the end of *Jak II*. This allows Naughty Dog to place Jak and Daxter in the wasteland at the beginning of this new chapter. Here they are found by Damus, the King of Spargus City – home of the 'forgotten ones', who each owe a life debt to the city for allowing them refuge from the desert elements. Spargus is an arena city, where banished Marauders fight for glory and sanctuary, and after only proving your worth in battle will Jak be accepted into the society. It is here that Jak will meet the Precursor monk Seem, and learn the path of Light before choosing his own destiny.

The wasteland itself, said to be five times the size of Haven City, is fully open-ended, impressively detailed and riddled with danger. Naughty Dog has promised that Jak and Daxter will return to Haven at some point in *Jak 3* too, though expect it to be rebuilt very differently and full of citizens who are no longer afraid to stand up for themselves. Clearly this is far more a progressive adventure than the two previous *Jak And Daxter* instalments, with a genuine sense of causality spun through its narrative events.

Jak's weapon set has also been improved greatly, as now his three colour-coded weapons each have three upgrades. For the standard yellow laser, improvement adds an Intelligent Ricochet, which chooses the angle of deflection most likely to hit an enemy. Blue upgrades to an effective lightning gun for its second stage, while the red fire gun can be pointed at the floor and used as a smart bomb. The final stage of tinkering for each gun consists of a floating drone gun for yellow, a *Half-Life*-esque bug gun for blue and an all-powerful rocket launcher on the red. ■



All the weapons in *Jak 3* carry a colourful light effect, which complement the well-lit levels and cement the overall quality of the package.



This is the final upgrade for the blue gun, and looks a lot like a swarm of flies that buzz violently between your adversaries and land in their orange juice.



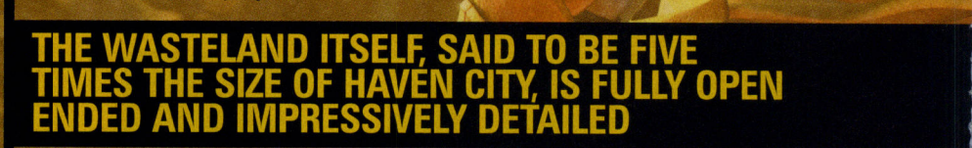
This forest is the location of a massive siege, in which day will dawn as you battle for your life.



Camera angles are used cleverly to heighten the comic effect of, say, a dead frog flying towards the screen.



Gentlemen, you can't fight in here – this is the war room! Hehehehe. Cue the pie fight.



THE WASTELAND ITSELF, SAID TO BE FIVE TIMES THE SIZE OF HAVEN CITY, IS FULLY OPEN ENDED AND IMPRESSIVELY DETAILED



JAK OF ALL TRADES

WE ASKED FOR AN ADVENTURE AND YOU DELIVERED A DRIVING SIM. NAUGHTY DOG!

If you know you're the type of gamer who underestimates cartoon adventure games you'll be interested to know that the eight dune buggies dotted around the wasteland each come with individual engine capacities, torque settings and gear ratios, as well as coming in front, rear and four-wheel drive models. What's more, they actually drive differently, although **play**™ can't help but feel that most adventure gamers probably wouldn't care to notice. At this suggestion, Evan Wells is upbeat: "The little extra touches will give the impression that you're playing a quality game, if not consciously then subconsciously." It's reassuring to know that such infinitesimal effort has not been included at the expense of other elements, and that every aspect of *Jak 3* is treated with this level of genuine care.

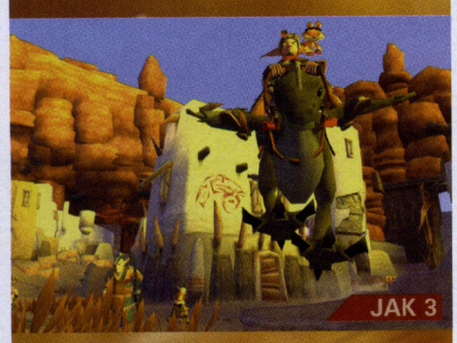














» how the strong narrative elements which held the previous instalments together have been advanced this time around – a process which typifies both developer's different approaches to game design. For *Ratchet & Clank*, the period between chapters two and three has seen something of a role reversal, with gamer-favourite Clank earning himself a role in a *Bond*-esque secret agent TV series, while Ratchet has been relegated to the level of hapless sidekick. Immediately, it's a set-up ripe for Insomniac's anarchic sense of knowing, referential humour and wealth of original ideas – something which development head Brian Allgeier is keen to emphasise. "Insomniac, at this point, is over one hundred people, and we get all sorts of ideas from everyone – it's a collaborative effort. The designers can't take credit for all the ideas, and neither can the story people because we get so many ideas... it's pretty hard to say where they all come from but there's never a shortage." It's unclear exactly whose inspired idea it was to add an online Multiplayer mode to a title you would expect to be an entirely one-player experience, but we'll return to that later.

For Evan Wells, Game Director at Naughty Dog – and soon to be Big Dog following the amicable departure of company head Jason Rubins – the key to creative success lies in developing each game individually and on its own merits, especially for a title that has so feverously sought to blur the lines between genres. "We try to create experiences that correspond to the core themes of the game," he begins, when asked about Jak's unusual progression from platform adventure to pseudo-*GTA* to this, the last in the trilogy-arc Rubins originally envisaged. "I hate to use the term 'platforming' because I think we've moved beyond simple platform gaming – we try to put our own spin on it in line with the *Jak And Daxter* universe... the way we try to keep the *Jak And Daxter* 'platform' fans interested in new ideas is to put our own play on them and keep it in a way that makes it all feel integrated." As a result, the beginning of *Jak 3* sees our intrepid duo banished from Haven City by the sinister Count Veger following *Jak II*'s Dark Jak exploits, forced to join a race of underclass called 'The Forgotten Ones' who inhabit the surrounding desert wasteland. Gone are the hover-cars of *Jak II*, replaced by *Mad Max*-esque dune buggies used to navigate the immense, free-roaming and surprisingly varied wasteland hub-world.

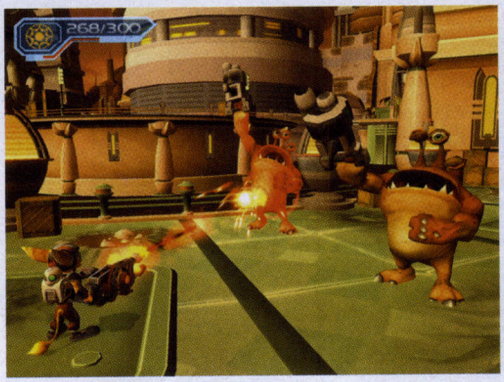
Again, it's a decision informed not by a need to be gamer-friendly, but by a desire to continue the narrative biologically. "The wasteland environment is referred to in *Jak II* because it's where Sig has come from," continues Wells. "So we hinted at it in *Jak II*, and we wanted to show the player in *Jak 3*." But why the apparent backwards shift in technology? "Well, the world is very different to the world of *Jak II*, where there are all sorts of Precursor, magic-type elements. The wasteland isn't about that – it's about mechanical elements, it's about the things you can find in order to survive. Thematically, we wanted to fit into that design, so they aren't going to have hover vehicles." In short, the themes, characters and environments inform the narrative and gameplay elements, a factor also evident in another new addition to the *Jak* universe – an angelic, defensive Light Jak to complement the aggressive Dark Jak persona of *Jak II: Renegade*. Wells offers simple reasoning for the character's evolution: "In *Jak II* we introduced the idea of Dark Jak – so it was only natural for us to balance that out with *Jak 3* – but it also plays importantly into the storyline", of which we are promised more at E3.

FOR A CONSOLE AS PERVASIVE AS PLAYSTATION2, THERE ARE ACTUALLY VERY FEW TRIPLE-A PLATFORM LICENSES

In contrast, *Ratchet & Clank*'s insistence on varied and often humorous firepower could be seen as a less sophisticated approach by cynical gamers wary of kiddie-fodder masquerading as quality gaming – and they would surely be wrong to assume as much – but the intent to keep a strong balance between »

FUNNY HOW?

THERE ARE NO ABSOLUTES IN COMEDY





"It's tough," begins Brian Allgeier when asked about Insomniac's approach to comedy, "because there's always a bunch of subjective choices developers have to make, and it's often like 'well, we can only have two winks to the camera and three nods.'" Such referential comedy will eventually get in the way of a good story and its effects on the audience is evident in a great many blockbuster movies, but few gamers could probably imagine their developers of choice arguing over the relevance of a joke or whether they have broken a taboo. In truth, a great deal of *Ratchet & Clank 3*'s humour originates from pop-culture references, from 'Secret Agent Clank' to smaller references in the dialogue. Interestingly, the method is also in direct opposition to Naughty Dog's approach to comedy: "We want to maintain the purity of the *Jak & Daxter* universe," states Evan Wells, "so we would never want to reference a character or movie in such a way that would make a connection to our world". The result is a self-contained fantasy narrative which finds humour through irony, pathos and a bit of the good-old pratfall-with-sound-effect technique.

RATCHET & CLANK 3

VITAL STATISTICS

PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Insomniac
WEB SITE: www.scea.com

GENRE
» PLATFORMER

NO. PLAYERS
» x 1-8

ALPHA

As mentioned before, the beginning of Ratchet's latest adventure sees him relegated to the role of sidekick, as Clank stars in a syndicated television series called 'Secret Agent Clank', a thinly-veiled *James Bond* rip-off with nods to *The Green Hornet*. While Clank relaxes in the glow of infamy, the universe is quickly forgetting Ratchet's previous efforts at heroism. Until, that is, Ratchet's home planet Veldin is threatened by the evil Dr Nefarious, a tyrant on a mission to eradicate biological life (or 'squishies' as he calls it) from the universe. To this end, Nefarious has employed the stupidest biological creatures in the galaxy to help him.

Answering the call of the President, Ratchet and Clank travel to Florana to extract "the only man who has defeated Nefarious", series regular Captain Qwark – who has spent the time between the two games in the rainforest going a bit Colonel Kurtz, and so must first be tamed before he can join your quest. From here the formula that worked so well with *Ratchet 1 & 2* returns, with each new level (including lush jungles, industrial complexes and futuristic cities) adding to Ratchet's arsenal of ridiculous weapons. Among those announced already include the Infector Gun (see main body text), a laser refractor and the Rift Inducer, a gun that literally fires a miniature black hole into the air, which sucks in any enemies around it before collapsing in on itself.

But the main focus of *Ratchet & Clank 3* for many will be the online multiplayer mode – a four-on-four team skirmish involving much shooting and driving of vehicles. It's reminiscent of a large-scale, outdoor *Laser Quest* battle, with both teams required to capture an opposing team's base while defending their own using carnage-producing arsenals. ■



RATCHET'S LATEST ADVENTURE SEES HIM RELEGATED TO THE ROLE OF SIDEKICK, AS CLANK STARS IN A TV SERIES



NOT-SO-SMART GUN

HOW DO YOU DRAW THE LINE BETWEEN 'CRAZY' AND JUST PLAIN STUPID?

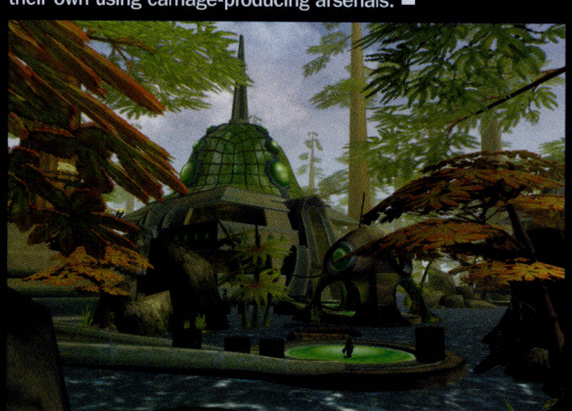
The *Ratchet & Clank* series is famed for its originality in creating new and improved hip-mounted methods of murder – on US shores this instalment will be subtitled 'Up Your Arsenal' – though when asked where the line is drawn on ridiculous firepower, Brian Allgeier smiles. "We had an idea for a gun that fires a disco ball," he remembers, "you fired it, and all the enemies started dancing and would ignore you. Stuff like that is funny, but then you can just go and kill them all. It's hard to balance something as powerful as that." It's a far cry from games where a single button press results in a kaleidoscopic full-screen explosion that lasts twenty seconds. "A lot of times an idea is way too powerful," chuckles Allgeier.



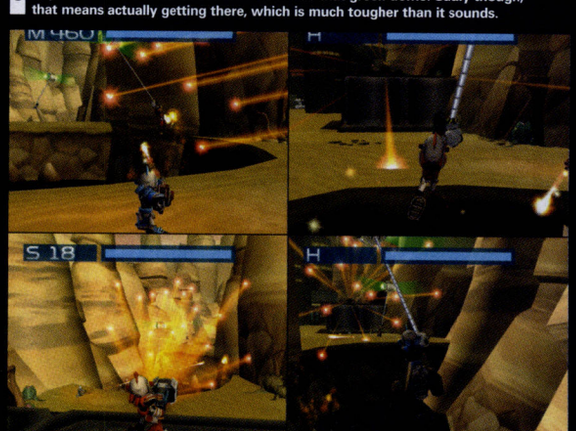
We've seen mirror puzzles like this before, but rarely on such a large scale.



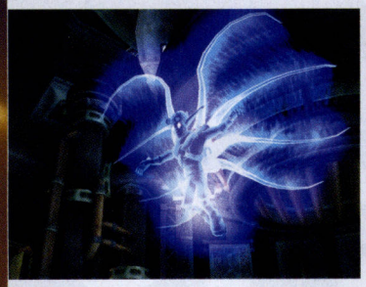
The cloud of green gas is the work of The Infector, which causes enemies to drunkenly turn against each other.



Captain Qwark should be somewhere inside that green dome. Sadly though, that means actually getting there, which is much tougher than it sounds.



This is a typical multiplayer snapshot – it rarely gets less frenetic and fast-paced than this. We don't think we've ever seen a shotgun with a wider spread either.







TAKE THESE BROKEN WINGS

AND LEARN TO FLY AGAIN, AND LEARN TO LIVE SO FREE

Looking like a skeletal blue neon angel, Light Jak represents the divine side of Eco-worship. Following his banishment for carrying the burden of Dark Jak, our hero finds a wasteland temple where a Precursor monk named Seem shows him the 'path of light', a spiritual belief system vaguely like a lighthearted Buddhism. Later, Jak will be forced to look deep within himself to find his own true spiritual path – while beating the hell out of anything that moves, obviously. Naughty Dog promises that Light Jak's move set – which includes flying as well as a shield/regeneration feature and a bonus skill to be revealed at E3 – will be more focussed on "facilitating Jak's movement through the level and not an aggressive mode."

» gameplay and character elements is still just as strong. Though Insomniac is keeping tight-lipped about many of the new weapons being introduced for the three-quel, the developer did demonstrate The Infector, a green gas-emitting gun which causes any enemies within inhalation range to attack one another. In any other game, it would be a duck shoot to empty the screen of baddies with such a formidable weapon, but as the beasts can still attack Ratchet at random, the player is never given cause to become complacent or forced to happily plod through each level unchallenged.

A good job too, as quick reflexes and an ability to think on your feet will be needed for the surprise Multiplayer modes, which Insomniac is confident will become a major selling point. "The fact we got such a positive reaction from playtesters really bodes well," beams Allgeier (apparently, nine out of ten respondents claimed they would buy the game even if it didn't have a single-player mode). Having managed to wangle some exclusive hands-on time with the online *Ratchet 3* code, **play**™ is inclined to agree with the developer. Also available in four-player split-screen (with zero loss of detail, no less), it's a massive bonus addition to a beautiful one-player game, that itself looks to better its predecessors in both scale and execution. But why, we finally ask, did Insomniac decide to add a battle mode to a traditionally one-player title? "One thing Insomnia has always tried to do is to give players choices," explains Allgeier. "Some people will choose just to play the online/multiplayer game, some will choose the single player and most people (hopefully) will choose both... We want players to know that we're also building a very large single-player game... You're getting the best of both worlds – it's like a value meal."

An ability to deviate from expectation is certainly a factor both Sony's games have in common, and the need to avoid pigeonholing from the marketing men is agreed upon by both developers. As well as 'Secret Agent Clank' acting as a running gag throughout the game, Insomniac promises the character will definitely feature in some solo levels. Likewise, *Jak 3* will feature a larger chunk of playable Daxter than in *Renegade*. Both teams have also been very careful to level out the learning curve, and to eradicate some of the more frustrating difficulty spikes which caused complaint last time around. "I've heard people say "Oh, I beat *Ratchet & Clank* in fifteen hours," describes Allgeier, conscious of the need to balance a game's challenge for both experienced and inexperienced gamers, "whereas someone else will say it took them 30 hours to complete". As Evan Wells elaborates, "Parts of *Jak II* weren't consistently harder, but we found players were spending an hour on them when we had envisaged perhaps twenty minutes of gameplay... the designers are making the patterns more consistent, and we're also going to address it by adjusting the difficulty dynamically to come in line with the player's skill level".

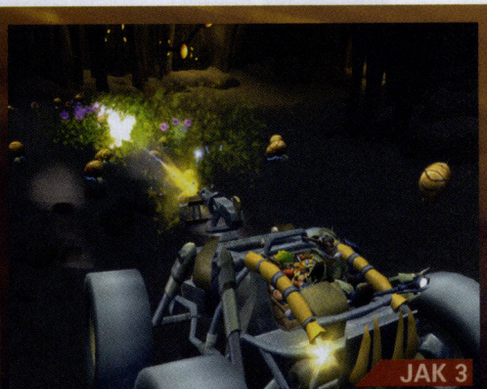
FOR ONCE, 'UNIQUE' DOESN'T SEEM TO BE A MISPLACED WORD AROUND JAK 3 OR RATCHET & CLANK 3

There are few identifiable aspects of these two games that haven't been considered, redrafted and shown to gamers for their approval before being returned to the drawing board for more laborious tweaking. But what really stands out, particularly with *Jak 3*, is the wealth of different game types Naughty Dog has managed to somehow cobble together into a cohesive adventure – to use a tenuous analogy, it's like *Crash Bandicoot* was actually *Crash Nitro Racing*, only with an exciting, sprawling storyline and characters you'd be proud to call your friends. As well as the promising driving sections, there are sections devoted to controlling a giant, spidery bomb-bot, levels that see Jak speedily laying track for a runaway train and a massive forest battle featuring mounted gun turrets, as well as new hoverboard manoeuvres and those top secret Light Jak moves, all courtesy of *Sonic*'s level-design legend Hirokazu Yasuhara ("That guy just thinks in a different way to everybody else" says Wells, "and he brings a unique sense of design to the team").

For once, 'unique' doesn't seem a misplaced word around either *Jak 3* or *Ratchet & Clank 3*, as both genuinely manage to carve their own niche in the world of videogames, and with it should garner a place in the collections of all types of gamers. As we move into the next generation of consoles, and with the advent of PSP, it is inevitable that other stalwarts of gaming will fall from grace as the games' technology develops faster than their characters or gameplay elements. **play**™ has little doubt that both of these titles will easily weather the storm and endure well beyond it. ■



The characters maybe of the cute and fluffy variety but the cityscape wouldn't be out of place in a Verhoeven movie.



If *Jak 3* doesn't escape the ever-broadening 'platformer' label, we don't know what will.



Playtesters said that they'd buy this game for the multiplayer alone and from the looks of these screens, we can see why.

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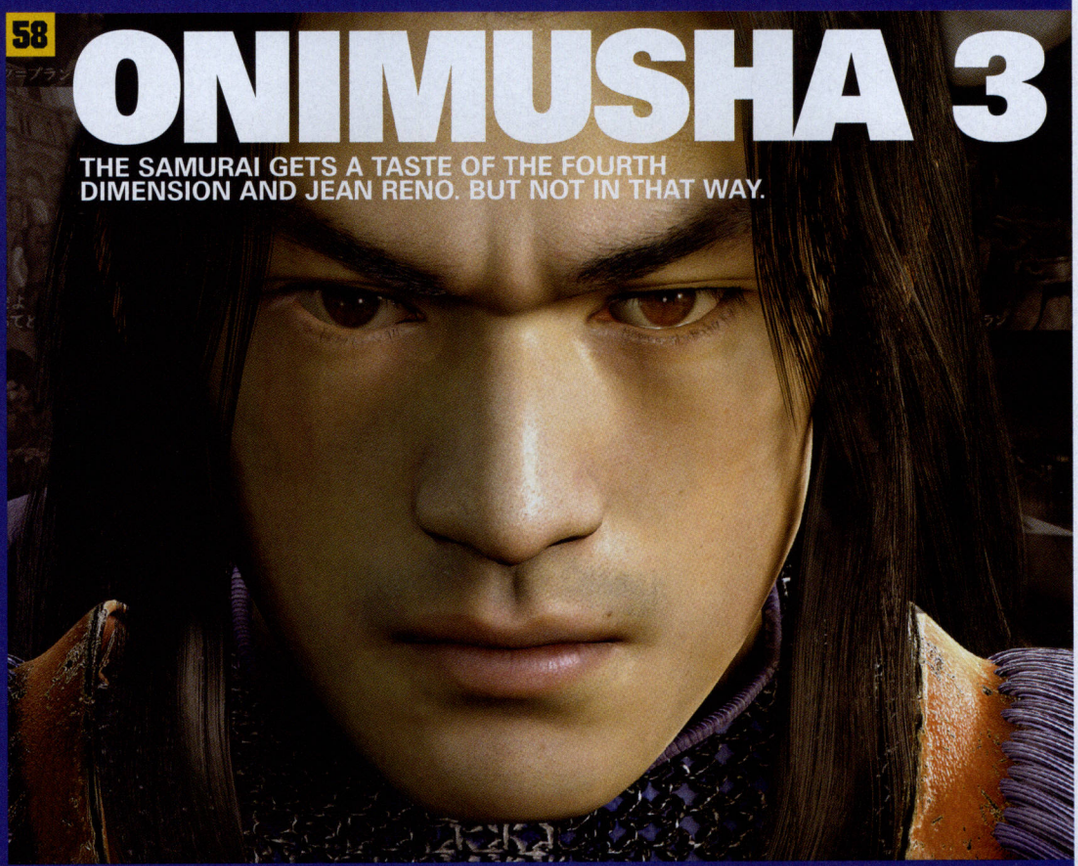
With FREE CD!

REVIEWS

Nice outfit. This month it's almost as if the **play**™ team jumped into a DeLorean (that would be a very wide DeLorean), hit 88 miles per hour and went back in time, *Back To The Future*-style, because there's a distinctly retro aroma to a few games up for review this month.

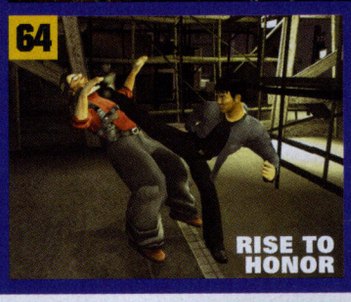
Hailing from a time when Michael Jackson was considered 'Bad' and famed for releasing seminal music albums instead of being accused of child molestation, the Mir Space Station was launched and wearing sweat bands was considered fashionable, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, a franchise that boasted an enormous toy range, cartoon (first airing in 1987), live action movie and association with Vanilla Ice, returns from hiatus, which leaves us with just one thing left to say – 'Cowabunga!'

Then Capcom gets in on the retro action, releasing *Hyper Street Fighter II* to mark the series' 15th anniversary – a celebration in videogame form of one of the most iconic games of the early Nineties. Where'd the time go?



58 **ONIMUSHA 3**

THE SAMURAI GETS A TASTE OF THE FOURTH DIMENSION AND JEAN RENO. BUT NOT IN THAT WAY.



64 RISE TO HONOR



68 MOJIB RIBON



70 TRANSFORMERS



82 **HITMAN: CONTRACTS**

Read the review, buy the game. That's the rules.

play™ GUARANTEE

Should you buy these games? That's the question we ask every time we review software. The **play**™ team has more than 20 years experience in the industry and bring every minute of that knowledge to every review. We don't get out much, so most of our common language is based on non-existent words like "playability" and "immersive" – we know so much about our craft it hurts.

GUIDE TO THE GRADES

We spend hours arguing over the stupidest things so every game gets the score it deserves.

90 – 100:	**Classic! Buy this game now!**
80 – 90:	Great games that you will love.
70 – 80:	Good fun, but lacking in magic.
60 – 70:	Just above average or short-lived.
50 – 60:	Acceptable, but nothing more.
40 – 50:	Average. Yawn.
30 – 40:	Buy it at your peril!
20 – 30:	Instant bargain bin fodder.
10 – 20:	It might load...
00 – 10:	No.

RE:VIEW

REVIEWS
Where games truly become art...

58 **ONIMUSHA 3**
The Capcom samurai goes all flux capacitor on some demon ass.

62 **HYPER STREET FIGHTER II**
Welcome to the most needless review since the last *Street Fighter* one.

64 **RISE TO HONOR**
Water is the softest stuff in the world but it can penetrate rock.

66 **FIGHT NIGHT 2004**
Silence is golden when you can't think of a good intro comment.

68 **MOJIB RIBON**
A game that's single-handedly revolutionising the email.

70 **TRANSFORMERS**
Decepticonned by another licence?

72 **ALIAS**
Decepticonned by another licence?

73 **SERIOUS SAM**
Honest or ironic? You be the judge.

74 **VAN HELSING**
Decepticonned by another licence?

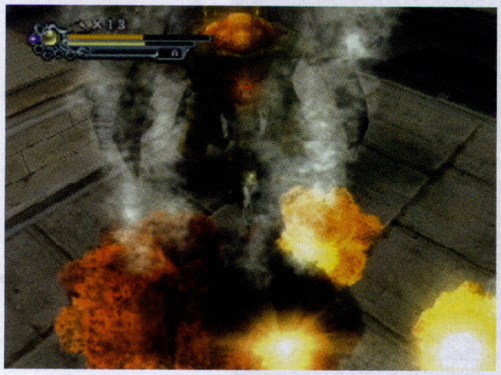
76 **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES**

77 **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY**
The game they play in heaven, apparently.

78 **SINGSTAR**
Fans of their own voice will love it.

80 **THE SUFFERING**
NB: Games that evoke utter apathy get 50%.

82 **HITMAN CONTRACTS**
Hitman baby, one more time! 93%, by the way.



Demon turds are just the worst. For Christ's sake, what do they eat?



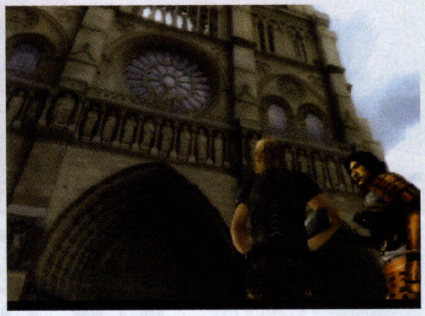
We'd bet money that this woman had to work extra hard to get to where she's got, and also that she's a right bitch because of it.



We've never understood why troops wear camouflage in urban warfare. It just doesn't make any sense.

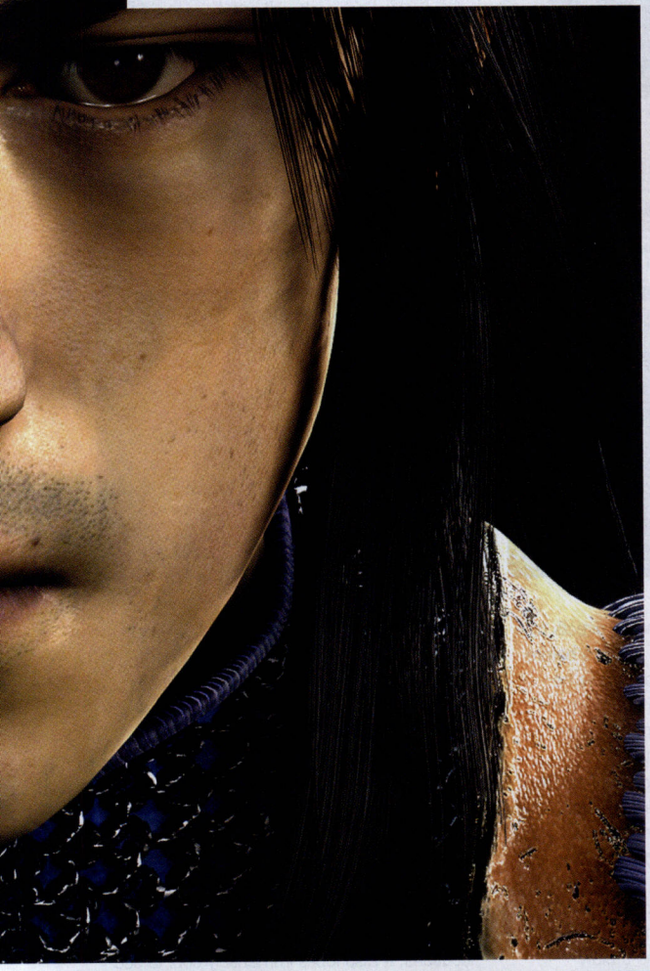






ONIMUSHA 3

WHY SHUFFLE LIKE A ZOMBIE WHEN YOU CAN STRUT LIKE A SAMURAI?



People going through a midlife crisis are occasionally heard mulling over the idea of being 'rebirthed' in a bid to reset any negative effects from their formative years, as if being smothered in a bed-sheet womb and donning a giant baby grow could have a dramatic effect on their current situation. Perhaps *Onimusha 3*'s producer was having something of a midlife crisis when designing this latest instalment, because the very foundations that the series has been built on have been expunged.

It's a well-known fact that *Onimusha* began life as a *Resident Evil* spin-off – it featured the same bizarre ' turning on a sixpence' control method, somehow accepted by gamers as you would an eccentric aunt or a favourite cat's flea problem, and a similar recipe of 'plug hexagon-shaped gap with hexagon-shaped hexagon' puzzles. *Onimusha 2* took the recipe and added a whole heap of sprinkles and chocolate chips, creating a superb game with a rewarding present-giving system. For *Onimusha 3* however, the recipe book has been ripped to shreds. *Resident Evil* has been shunned like it's your parents' favourite popstar in favour of the new king of cool – *Devil May Cry*. The control system has been replaced, and that means series legend Samanosuke and the Gallic god Jacques Blanc get to run around like Dante, stabbing and skewering hell's finest. Needless to say, this has a profound effect on the game's overall feel.

An awful lot of hype has surrounded the casting of Jean Reno as Jacques Blanc – Reno of course, starred as a super stylish assassin in the movie *Leon* (and turned down the role of Agent Smith in *The Matrix*... great career move, eh?). He joins up with original samurai Samanosuke, as ever bearing the likeness of actor and singer Takeshi Kanehiro, who played a super stylish assassin in *Returner* – can you spot Capcom's trick yet? The game's plot, which spins back and forth between 21st century Paris and feudal Japan is effective (if somewhat hackneyed), allowing for all manner of atmospheric locations to be used as battlegrounds and dynamic scenarios to arise from timeline switching.

Unlike previous games in the series, number three ditches pre-rendered backgrounds in favour of a full-on 3D approach and still delivers great visuals. Call us traditionalists though, because while L'Arc de Triomphe has been recreated with no lack of verve, it's the ancient Japan environments that capture our imagination with their intricate statues and elaborate architecture. Fixed camera angles still dictate your view of each location, however this does allow for some pretty spectacular framing of the action. Complimenting the drama admirably is the stirring soundtrack – Taiko drums thunder and horn sections blare during heated moments, while choral compositions kick in for the tranquil moments. This game deserves to be played loud.

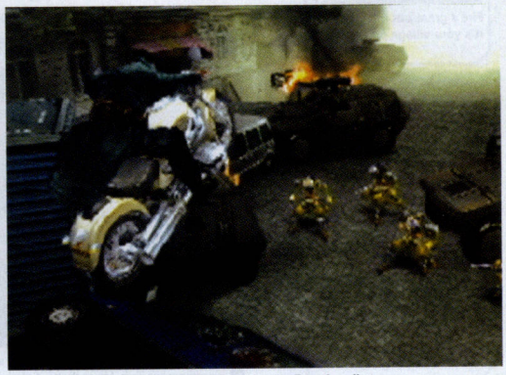
RESIDENT EVIL HAS BEEN SHUNNED LIKE IT'S YOUR PARENT'S FAVOURITE POPSTAR IN FAVOUR OF THE NEW KING OF COOL – DEVIL MAY CRY



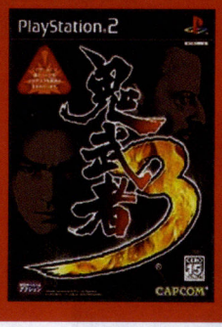
Someone's blown a huge bubble with what looks like hubba-bubba gum. Let's hope the demon war doesn't burst it.



You start off with a gun as Jacques and then get bestowed with a whip, which somehow, is a much better weapon for demon-death.



Somebody sure wasn't absent the day the French police taught 'How to make a super-cool entrance'.



ONIMUSHA 3

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Capcom | **DEVELOPER:** In house | **PRICE:** $ Import
AGE RATING: 16+ | **WEB SITE:** www.capcom.co.jp

1 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

- Is the final instalment of the *Onimusha* series.
- Utilises a brand new fully 3D engine which looks superb.
- Features a slew of new characters including Jean Reno.

PRIOR FORM

"*Onimusha 3* isn't just about killing but killing with style – Gallic, hook-nosed, Gitanes-smoking style", or so we reported in our preview in issue 3. It turns out that we've never printed a truer word – just wait until you see Jacques blowing samurai zombies away with his pistol – it's like a rebirth of videogame cool.

IMPORT REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW (JAP)

» IF THIS GAME WAS

A FILM IT WOULD BE BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF

Because both of them are testament to the fact that a bit of Gallic charm goes a long way to spicing up a tale of good vs evil.

STAND-OUT MOMENTS

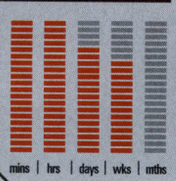

A battle rages between samurai and zombies.


With your help the samurai are victorious.


Proof of the game's cinematic approach.


Fire's great but not when it's your village on fire.

PLAYTIME



GENIE IN A BOTTLE

Meet Ako (at least we think that's her name), Jacques' and Samanosuke's Tinkerbell-inspired companion, who's about the same size as that buttockless-chap wearing popstar Christina Aguilera. What her *modus operandi* is we can't fathom, but she's blessed with the abilities to flit back and forth between time zones sending messages from hero to hero, to get in on the levelling-up deal with a special tunic that can be powered up with various gems and to fetch hard to reach items too. She also bears a more than a passing resemblance to Mathilda – Natalie Portman's character in *Leon* – starring none other than our main man Jean Reno.


Bowl cut, crop top, neckband – a definite nod to *Leon* character Mathilda.

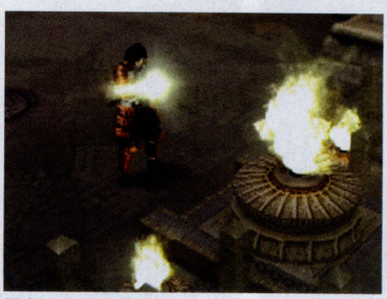

Jacques had taken so long to climb this mountain that it was actually winter when he started – which explains the coat. Damn was he pissed when he found out that there was a lift on the other side.





The opening level sees you picking up the reins of Samanosuke making his way to the Honnoji Temple, which just happens to be a raging inferno – it's a glorious opening scene sucking the player straight into the game. Next, up pop some none-too-friendly neighbourhood demons and *Onimusha* veterans are guaranteed to feel a surge of elation, because the shuffling Samanosuke of old is no more – he actually runs in the direction you tilt the stick. Such an obvious and craved for improvement from Capcom and now it's finally here.

Unshackled from the aged *Resident Evil* control method, Sam is fleet of foot, adding a massive touch of pizzazz to the fighting.


Sam was annoyed at the size of the emerald in his engagement ring. He reckons it slows him down.

Engage a group of enemies and he directs his attacks at whoever's nearest – if it dies before he's finished his flourish of sword blows he gracefully pirouettes, raining strikes down on the next-nearest foe. The rest of the control method functions exactly as fans will remember it. As ever, deceased fiends release a variety of different soul orbs into the air that can be sucked up using ⊗ (see the 'Wake for Young Souls' boxout) and L1 guards – dashed handy on bosses and a few of the larger enemies the game throws at you, but an unnecessary luxury on sword-fodder. There's also a magic-imbued attack and a blow modifier, which causes Sam to produce his Long Bow for taking out distant targets and airborne enemies. Interestingly, players loathe to ditch the old control system will find it mapped to the digital pad, but after extended play with its replacement, revisiting it for purposes of nostalgia is particularly jarring – we won't be missing it, that's for sure.

While Samanosuke sticks pretty rigidly to the surly Ronin template, our French pal Jacques is a real hodgepodge of influences – his initial weapon is a compact machine gun – a real departure for the *Onimusha* series, and briefly introduced in the opening scene. Use of the gun is quickly taken away from you when Jacques is sucked through a portal to Japan and introduced to his energy whip weapon with shades of *Indiana Jones*. In practice, Jacques' attacks work in a mightily similar way to Samanosuke's, with similarly prescribed attack combos. However, he has a few tricks of his own and in a nod to Tecmo's *Rygar*, Jacques is able to use his weapon to traverse environments by whipping certain hook points, which are in fact little fairy-type beings – yes, it's bizarre, but it worked in *Rygar* and it works equally well here, allowing for a greater level of interaction with the attractively-modelled locations. It also looks immensely cool to see Jacques swinging through the air. Later, his whip is upgraded to a segmented sword-cum-whip combo – as brandished by Ivy in *Soul Calibur* – once again demonstrating the disparate influences that have gone into the game and specifically Jacques' design.

Collecting the souls of fallen enemies allows you to power up your current character's weapons and armour whenever you come to a save point. Sadly, this element of the game is criminally underdeveloped, while the benefits of powering up each individual item is not exactly clear. Thankfully though, given the increased onus on fighting in the game, there are a number of training

GOOD POINTS

- Jean Reno.
- The opening CGI movie from ROBOT.
- The new control scheme – this is how we want samurai to handle.





BAD POINTS

- It's all in Japanese – and we don't speak a word.
- The puzzle element isn't deep enough to satisfy.
- It makes us realise we'll never be as cool as Jean Reno.

missions accessible from the save points, which take the form of an arena battle against a pick 'n' mix assortment of villains. Completion of the arena instructs you in the way of an additional fighting technique adding an extra layer of depth to the combat. Before long you'll be blessed with a host of counterattacking and offensive manoeuvres of increased power.

As seems to be fashionable at the moment – see Torque in *The Suffering*, Jak in *Jak II* and the Hulk in *The Hulk* – during times of peril, and provided they have collected enough of the prerequisite souls, both Sam and Jacques can transform into a hyper-powered *Onimusha* form. Not only do they look seriously ticked off, the attacks that they emit are even more powerful and any blows landed on enemies release health souls – it's a clever way of ensuring that difficult boss battles aren't prohibitively tough.

So, a liberal dose of swordplay then. Of course, bearing in mind the fact that *Onimusha 3* is jam-packed with Japanese text and voiceovers, it's safe to assume that we're missing out on a fair few of the game's more subtle nuances. However, it's painfully obvious that the final PAL version won't exactly test the old grey matter any more than say, sticking a disc into a very signposted, so-obvious-you-can't-miss-it, disc-shaped crevice – *Onimusha* is very much a straightforward hack-and-slash from A to C by way of B. More often than not when a puzzle presents itself – the afore-mentioned disc-shaped hole missing its disc or a generator missing a crank arm, for example – you are shepherded by the level design to exactly where the missing item lies. It's then just a case of backtracking, usually no more than a few screens, to slot the item into place and progress to the next area. It's by no means a chore and at least provides a little punctuation to the fighting, but a few trickier brainteasers and less linear routes would have created a far more gripping and varied journey.

ONIMUSHA IS VERY MUCH A STRAIGHTFORWARD HACK-AND-SLASH FROM A TO C BY WAY OF B

Another underdeveloped aspect of the game is the involvement of various sidekicks. Early on, Samanosuke forms an alliance with the aesthetically pleasing Michelle who follows the player around helping to dispatch enemies. Unfortunately, it seems her AI routines include a 'daydream' command, as often she becomes rooted to the spot, making her something of a human barricade on the game's claustrophobic sewer section, eradicating any sense that there's an intelligent being co-operating with you. An even more criminal example occurs later when Sam joins Jacques in battle against a particularly tough samurai – Sam's enthusiasm for the battle is laughable and totally at odds with the battle hungry personality he exhibits when under your own slash-happy control.

The word is that *Onimusha 3* will be the final title in the series, which is a real shame, not only because the quality of each instalment has been refreshingly high, but because players still haven't been granted a definitive *Onimusha* experience – the control method has finally been given the spruce-up it needs, the presentation is impeccable and the fighting enjoyable. However, the puzzle element of the game is chronically under-nourished, holding *Onimusha 3* back from classic status – a victim of the *Devil May Cry* effect if ever there was one. We do fully expect our score for the PAL version to be a little higher than this one though, providing the voice acting is up to scratch – and the plot isn't merely a load of metaphysical masturbation, of course. ■

WAKE FOR YOUNG SOULS

Once again souls make a return to the world of *Onimusha*. The souls of dead foes can be reaved using ⊗. Yellow souls replenish your energy gauge, blue, your magic bar, pink souls are collected and later used to level up your stats at save points, while purple souls are the real rarities – collect five and you're granted the ability to turn into your Onimusha form, which not only enables you to kick much arse, but provides additional benefits such as releasing extra yellow souls.





Paris. It got destroyed in *Armageddon* and now demonized in *Onimusha 3*. Tough break.



We can't say that we always felt a pixellated version of Jean Reno walking on top of ancient Japanese roof-tops was the next logical step for videogames, but if the boot fits…



Seriously though, who did the demons think was going to win? Them or the guy with Tom Cruise's armour? Idiots.

VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

The Japanese levels are lovely, shame about the bland sewer level though.

SOUND

Powerful compositions and not a noodling guitar lick to be heard – bliss.

GAMEPLAY

The *Devil May Cry* influence has turned out to be both a blessing and a curse.

LONG TERM

Different weapons to power up, hidden moves to earn – it'll last a while.

OR YOU COULD TRY



ONIMUSHA 2

Slower paced, but certainly deeper in places and almost as atmospheric as its sequel. 90%



DEVIL MAY CRY

The influence of this particular gem speaks for itself. Wonderful. 93%

SUMMARY

The *Onimusha* series' identity crisis continues as it ditches many of its *Resident Evil* trappings and pulls off its best *Devil May Cry* impression, which actually turns out to be a good thing as this is some of the best hack 'em and slash 'em fun we've had in a long while.

83 PERCENT



HYPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE ANNIVERSARY EDITION

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Capcom | **DEVELOPER:** Capcom | **PRICE:** $79.95
RATING: TBC | **WEB SITE:** www.thq.com.au

1-2 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Features Normal, *Champion Edition*, *Turbo*, *Super* and *Super Turbo* versions of each character.

_The *Street Fighter* series has sold more than 27 million copies.

_Zangief is far from crap – believe it.

PRIOR FORM

We *love Street Fighter*, and we'll prove it – in issue 2's preview we said "If the latest code proves one thing, it's that *Street Fighter* is still one of the best fighting games out there." Just ignore the bit that said Evil Ryu will be making an appearance in *Hyper Street Fighter II* – he won't be because he didn't debut until *Alpha 2*.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
4 JUNE 2004

HYPER STREE
THE ANNIVER

15 YEARS IN THE MAKING

Whoa, déjà vu – if anything is worth $80 of your hard-earned (or illegally gained for that matter) money, it's the slightly-furry-around-the-edges feeling of nostalgia that playing *Hyper Street Fighter II* imparts. However, unlike many trips down memory lane, where dusting off an old classic is a lot like swigging from a ten year-old bottle of milk and expecting the contents to be cool and fresh, playing *Hyper Street Fighter II* is more akin to sipping vintage wine – it gets better with age.

Actually that's not quite right – while the *Hyper Street Fighter II* engine, based on the one used in *Super Turbo*, is one of the most finely-crafted fighting game engines ever created, the sad fact is the aged *Street Fighter* sprites are looking well past their use-by date. If you're happy to treat *Hyper Street Fighter* as an anthology in the vein of *Midway Arcade Classics* then this is perfectly excusable, but we can't deny that we're itching to see the *Street Fighter* cast reborn – no, not in 3D (heathens...) – but in some high resolution 2D artwork of *Guilty Gear X* calibre.

Instead of creating a collection of five separate *Street Fighter II* incarnations, Capcom has instead opted for a megamix of the five, basically meaning that at the character select screen, you not only choose your character but the era they come from as well. This of course has a dramatic impact on many of the characters – see *The Generation Game* boxout. Sadly though, if you're playing solo, the computer only ever plays as the *Super Turbo* iteration of each character. This is a massive flaw in the game, making it more of a bastardised *Super Turbo* than a genuine retro effort. It also makes the game freakin' difficult if you're masochistic enough to take out an original era character on the highest difficulty setting – vintage winning tactics from back in the day are crushed by the more modern *Super Turbo* characters and their fancy-pants super moves.

Perhaps the greatest handicap facing players, however, is the DualShock2 – for connoisseurs bred in the arcades or on consoles of yesteryear and their fighting game-friendly joypads, adapting to a DualShock2 is a chore – the digital pad is an obvious encumbrance and no combination of R1, R2, △, □, ○ or ✕ will ever feel as natural as having six buttons laid out in a fighting configuration and as a



△ Vega gives T-Hawk a lesson on how to prance about like a girl and still manage to kick ass.



△ Those who have doubted Zangief's power are clearly only amateurs when it comes to *Street Fighter*.

» IF THIS GAME WAS

AN ARCADE CABINET IT WOULD BE A WELL-WORN STREET FIGHTER II ONE

Because what it might lack in glitz and glamour it makes up for with the very finest in retro gameplay. Sweet.

STAND OUT MOMENTS



A flying roundhouse kick starts the combo...



...links into a standing punch, which links into a...

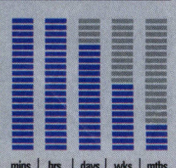


...Fierce Dragon Punch, which hits twice.



Or you could just do a Spinning Piledriver.

PLAYTIME



THE GENERATION GAME

If you're out of the loop on all things *Street Fighter* related, the revelation that *Hyper Street Fighter II* enables you to choose between different generations of character will mean little. So allow us to explain, using *Street Fighter*'s poster boy, Ryu, as an example. In the original *Street Fighter II*, Ryu was blessed with just three special moves – a fireball (Hadoken), a Dragon Punch (Shoryuken) and a Hurricane Kick (Tatsumaki). Got that? Come *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting*, he had learned how to perform his Hurricane Kick in mid-air; by *Super Street Fighter* he gained a more powerful version of his fireball, while his mid-air Hurricane Kick travelled on a new trajectory. By *Super Turbo*, Ryu is hardly recognisable from his humble beginnings, gaining a brand new super fireball and all manner of alternative punch animations.



Traditional Ryu performs his trade mark Dragon Punch.



The Tatsumaki Senpukyaku performed in mid-air.



Now that's a Fireball. Even in the early days Ryu was a formidable character

GOOD POINTS

- Five minutes of play is all it takes to conjure up memories of past victories – beautiful.
- Choice of original music
- Arguably the best fighting game engine ever created.





BAD POINTS

- Playing on a DualShock is like expecting Henry to play football in Wellington boots.
- Capcom are still peddling the same old character sprites .
- Some people prefer 3D games.

T FIGHTER II: SARY EDITION

net result you *will* struggle to perform a few of the game's more elongated and troublesome combos.

However, it's a moot point when two players go head to head, or better still, a group of players battle it out in a winner-stays-on contest, as the disadvantage is universal. In contrast to the disappointing one-player mode, versus mode is a riotous success, with both players free to pick and choose both character and era. This naturally leads to heated battles, and when both players are masters, well, it's enough to bring a tear to the eye. Not only are versus battles as compelling as they were 12 years ago when the original *Street Fighter II* was first released, but they're a great way to acclimatise old players who've strayed from the fold with new-fangled concepts like super moves. There are actually people out there who've never experienced the joys of a Final Atomic Buster – it's shocking, we know.

For anyone that has fond memories of playing *Street Fighter* in those halcyon 16-bit days, *Hyper Street Fighter II* is a no-brainer purchase, especially at $80 – the sepia-toned memories it evokes are priceless. So why hasn't it scored more? Well, as we've already mentioned, the graphics which might well have been a revelation in 1992 have been totally surpassed by the *Guilty Gear X* series, and that's not the only area that *Hyper Street Fighter* is lacking. Capcom was always famed for releasing endless *Street Fighter* updates and while few ever captured the success of the *Street Fighter II Turbo* days, they all managed to further refine, tweak and hone the experience. We might praise *Hyper*'s precision gameplay but *Street Fighter Alpha 2* was even more balanced and tactical, *Alpha 3* did the select-a-playing-style approach with even greater verve, not to mention offering a two-player co-operative mode and *Street Fighter 3*, well, it's a further evolution of what's on offer here, introducing a wonderful parrying system.

So make no mistake about it, buy *Hyper Street Fighter II: The Anniversary Edition* and you're only reliving the past where the *Street Fighter* series offers so much more than what's presented here. However, *Street Fighter* fans that have fallen by the wayside should grab a copy as soon as possible, not only is it guaranteed to rekindle your fighting spirit but hopefully it'll convince Capcom to hurry up and release *Street Fighter 4*. ■



Cammy used to be a great character but now we can't help but think of Kylie and by association, the movie. This means that Cammy is irredeemably hated by the PLAY team.

PLAYING HYPER STREET FIGHTER II IS MORE AKIN TO SIPPING VINTAGE WINE – IT GETS BETTER WITH AGE



The original arcade attract sequence is here in all its glory. Oh, all right, it looks crap.



"Hadoken" – 'nuff said.



The phrase that launched a million rumours. And no, you *can't* play as Sheng Long.

VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

Double the above figure if you're actually reading this in 1992.

SOUND

Features some of the most whistleable videogame tunes ever composed.

GAMEPLAY

Awesome stuff, but Capcom's later work improved the formula further.

LONG TERM

The walk down memory lane is nearly always just a short stroll.

OR YOU COULD TRY



CAPCOM VS SNK 2

2D beat-'em-ups seem to have some fight left in them after all.
95%



CAPCOM VS MARVEL 2

A pantomime of a beat-'em-up game. Far too chaotic to be fun.
61%

SUMMARY

It's not quite the *Street Fighter* anthology we were hoping for but there's no doubting its ability to delight even after all these years. Hopefully *Hyper Street Fighter II* signifies Capcom putting the hallowed 'II' series to rest, before releasing *Street Fighter 4*. We can but dream.

77 PERCENT



RISE TO HONOUR

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Sony | **DEVELOPER:** Foster City Studio| **PRICE:** $99.95
RATING: M15+ | **WEB SITE:** au.playstation.com

1-2 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Feaures a fully motion captured Jet Li, which looks incredible.

_Action directed by famous fight-choreographer Cory Yuen.

_Features a 360° combat system.

PRIOR FORM

This may not have been a movie license but we were worried that this was going to turn into a Jet Li money wagon. Needless to say, these worries were soon pushed away.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

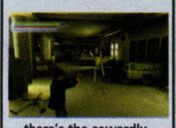
A FIGHTING STYLE IT WOULD BE DRUNKEN BOXING.

This game is, deceptively, a lot better than you might imagine and is definitely entertaining to watch.

STAND-OUT MOMENTS

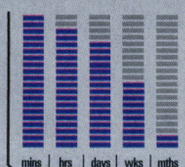

Jet clearly has many ways to fight.

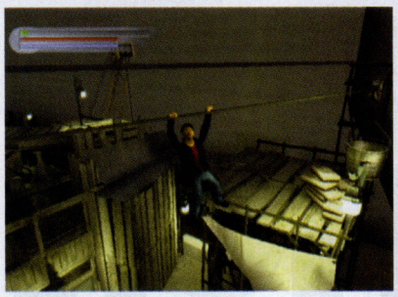

There's simple yet manly hand-to-hand combat...

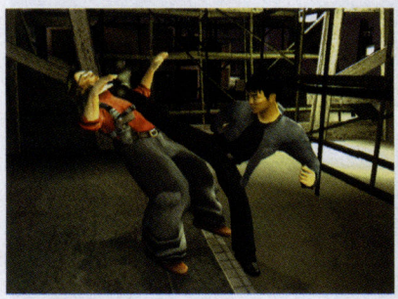

...there's the cowardly use of a firearm...

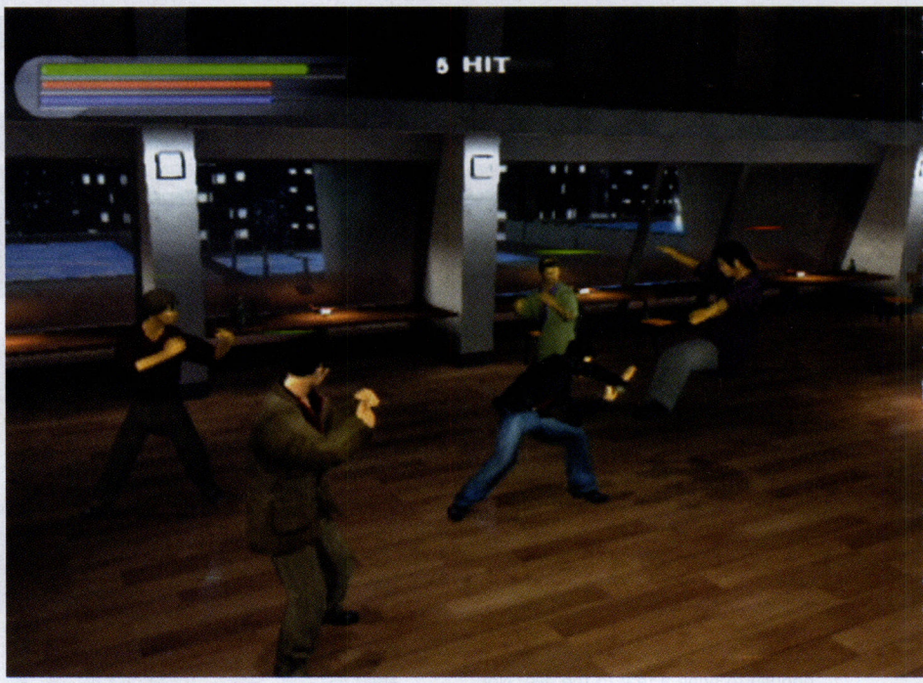

...or the more imaginative method: drowning.

PLAYTIME




Rise To Honour has sucked us in zipline and sinker. Heh.


Jet may look cool but secretly he's thinking that he might have ripped his trousers with that one.



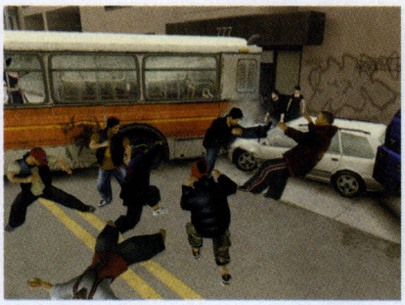
RISE TO HONOUR

LI-DING THE WAY FOR MARTIAL ARTS GAMES EVERYWHERE

Ages and ages ago now there was a rumour going around that John Woo (of *Face/Off* fame) was setting up his own videogame company. This was very exciting prospect that led to our dreams becoming full of all kinds of crazy, plot-free, Eastern game action. Unfortunately this never really became much more than a rumour and, apart from the occasional mediocre movie tie in, there have been no games to bring these desires to fruition. That is until *Rise To Honour*.

It seems a bit of a cliché to say that this game makes you feel as if 'you're playing through a film' but that's exactly what it does. This is full of cool action, cool stunts and cool fight scenes with you looking cool in the middle of it all. Cool. Hey, we're not easily pleased (not by a long way) but this does manage to capture that martial arts action essence in a way few games can. Obviously being able to play as Jet Li helps a lot and it's obvious that the developer has watched a lot of films to get an idea of how action sequences should work. For example, the game sees you getting dumped into the centre of a group of thugs at the start of every cannon-fodder fight scene with each thug a little unsure of whether to go for you or not. Of course, as soon as one grunt makes the first move, everything kicks off and some well-placed breakable scenery starts begging for falling bodies. This is classic martial arts movie-making made specifically to make the hero look good. Whilst avoiding being too easy, the game tries very hard to ensure that you can show-off playing the game regardless of how badly you're actually doing.

THIS IS FULL OF COOL ACTION, COOL STUNTS AND COOL FIGHT SCENES WITH YOU LOOKING COOL IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL


When you get surrounded the game can become a little unforgiving but every so often you'll come out unscathed.


Pillars, walls and handy boxes can be used for cover but this is about as close as this game gets to any stealth elements.



A quick 360° rotation of the stick and three evil doers are introduced to the floor.

GOOD POINTS

- Feels like a Jet Li film in the way that it's pretty simple but full of action.
- Great animation throughout.
- Fluid control system.





BAD POINTS

- A very linear game.
- Annoying camera that often hinders the action.
- No Multiplayer mode, despite the well-implemented fighting system.

KISS OF THE DRAGON

The developer has done a stunning job of transferring Jet Li into the digital world. The character model is nothing short of perfect and the animation (all captured by Li) remains true to his fighting style. If you are a fan of the Jet then you're going to be very happy with this game.



Don't stare at this screenshot for too long, it might be lethal.



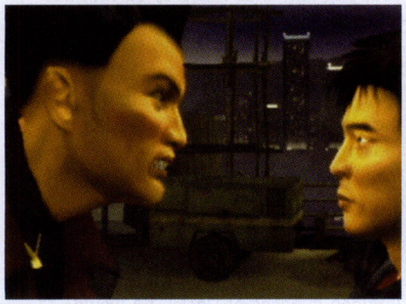
This includes the obligatory use of slow motion, but don't worry, the game hasn't gone all *Matrix* on us. Yes, you can jump through the air in slow motion whilst firing off two guns, but the game only slows down a fraction and the screen only blurs a slight amount to give you that all-important rush without you realising you're still playing a game. Just play *Enter The Matrix* or *Max Payne* and you'll see what we mean by the fact that overuse of this effect can detract from the gameplay.

The best use of slow motion in the game comes with the ultra-stylish, Wushu-powered big hits. On the occasional important punch or kick, the camera will switch to a dramatic angle, showing the blow in slow-motion before cutting back to the action. Unfortunately, this is a bit overused in the game. It should only be reserved for the bigger opponents or the bodies crashing into scenery but regardless, it's still good to watch to begin with and it does give you a breather later on when you're bored of looking at them.

Another reason the action scenes are so good in this game is because the developer has very wisely decided to vary the content. This means you get sections where it's you versus loads of thugs in hand-to-hand combat, you stuck in the middle of a gunfight or you racing to get something done. Okay, so admittedly the variety here doesn't have 'wideload' stamped on the side but it's certainly sufficient enough to avoid any kind of monotony.

The control system manages to cope with all situations without too many problems. The use of the right analogue stick for combat (although no longer original) is a fantastic idea for a game like this. Knock the stick in the appropriate direction and you can lash out with satisfying force. This can be used to link lots of moves together in a variety of directions in true martial arts style. The only major drawback to this is the fact that you cannot control the camera, which can be very annoying. Half of the time the game remains cinematic (usually during the action) but at other times you will inevitably get very annoyed. Surely, it shouldn't be this difficult to find your way around in a linear, glorified scrolling beat-'em-up.

If the action sequences weren't so damn good it would be difficult to overlook this, but then, what else would you expect from an official Jet Li game? We would love to have sat in on the motion capture for this particular game – the animations are spot on and we recommend holding down the dodge button and just watching Mr Li duck and weave around every blow thrown at him. Like we said, this game has cool written all over it. Of course there is only so long this martial arts action novelty can last but there's plenty of fun in here to justify a purchase. ■



Jet has clearly opted for the legendary squeeze-the-other-guy's-balls move.



Finally, after years of dreaming, we finally have a game that does justice to a helicopter versus Jet battle.



The slow-motion scenes don't suffocate the game like other bullet-time based actioners called *Max Payne*.

VERDICT

LOOKS

Decent enough visuals and some fantastic animation throughout the game.

SOUND

Good voice acting with some fairly competent sound effects for the combat sections.

GAMEPLAY

A little bit shallow but a great laugh to play with a nice fighting system.

LONG TERM

Odds are slim that you'll play through this more than once.

OR YOU COULD TRY



BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

Another third person beat-'em-up with a big name in the lead role.
80%



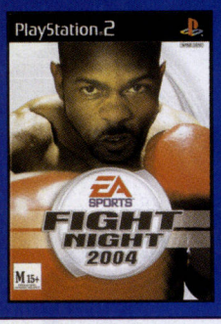
BLADE II

Makes use of a directional attack system but with limited success.
65%

SUMMARY

The camera may be dodgy at times and it *is* a one-trick pony, but this is still a very entertaining game. If you play a lot of videogames it's probably safe to say that you like martial arts films, and if you watch a lot of those then it's safe to say you'll love this.

77 PERCENT



FIGHT NIGHT 2004

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: EA Sports | **DEVELOPER:** In-house | **PRICE:** $99.95
RATING: M15+ | **WEB SITE:** www.easports.com

1-2 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Features the 'revolutionary' Total Punch Control system.

_One helluva list of pugilists, including Ali, Frazier and La Motta.

_Superb likenesses in both looks and animation.

PRIOR FORM

This is actually *Fight Night*'s **play**™ debut as there was no preview code available previously. However, we *have* played *Knockout Kings* before (EA's previous attempt at covering the sport) and suffice to say that EA has decided to ditch that particular franchise in favour of *Fight Night*. Good for EA.

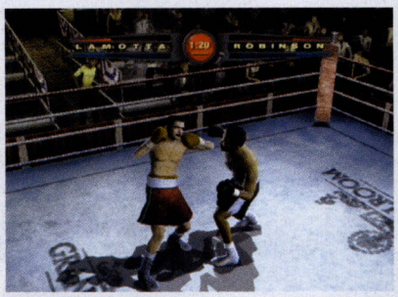
RE:VIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

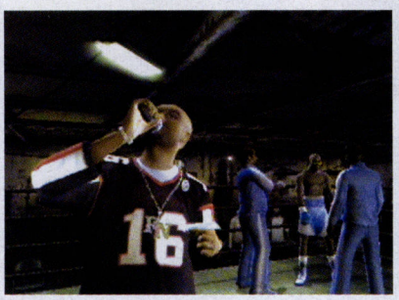
» IF THIS GAME WAS

A CHILDHOOD PASTIME, IT WOULD BE THUMB WARS

At first it feels odd and tends to really work the old opposables but pretty soon you'll be having far too much fun to care.



La Motta Vs Robinson. It's like *Raging Bull*, only in colour and... actually, it's not like *Raging Bull* at all is it?



This is Tigger, he commentates throughout the game and needs to be shot.



FIGHT NIGHT 2004

A GAME SO BAD* IT MAKES MEDICINE SICK

Ding, ding. Silly words, but rest assured they form an onomatopoeia of something that has preceeded some of the greatest stories of triumph since man first learnt he could hurt someone else using his fist. We are, of course, talking about boxing.

The sport of punching has a history that's smothered in drama, the best of which has been, more often than not, successfully translated to film, be it a documentary or motion picture. These prizefighters have been the sporting giants and ogres of the past century. They're strong and powerful. We want to be them. Videogames may one day enable us to be just that, but until that day we'll have to make do with *Fight Night 2004*, which as it turns out, isn't a bad thing at all.

EA is so loaded it makes Don King look like an electrocuted vagrant on some kind of acid trip. There is a bad side to this: EA can get greedy and drip out some lazy sequel to a weak franchise. The good side? Well apart from the spit and polish we've become accustomed to thanks to EA's large wad of cash, it can afford to, and occasionally does, try something new. *FIFA*'s Off-The-Ball (TM) gimmick didn't really work but goddamnnit if *Fight Night*'s Total Punch Control system isn't the best use of the right analogue stick since, well, its invention.

The TPC system is no doubt what EA will be shouting about come advert time and, for a change, rightly so. Instead of trying to button-bash your way through an Ali-Frazier bout as you would in *Knockout Kings*, *Fight Night*'s control system offers a much more fluid and graceful representation of the sport. And as any Angelo Dundee-wannabe will tell you, pugilism is as much to do with not hitting as it is to do with pummelling your opponents already ugly face in. The TPC system understands this and enables the player to stop halfway through a haymaker if, for whatever reason, they so desire. It's not all glory for the innovative system though, as it can be thumb-socket-rippingly hard to use at times, but, like a fixed Marciano fight, it gets results.

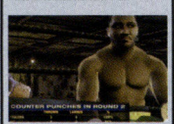
It's strange to think that after the (critical) success of *Rocky*, EA would choose to be so innovative in what is

DESPITE SUCH WELCOME INNOVATION, FIGHT NIGHT IS STILL A FEW GYM-VISITS AWAY FROM BEING A KNOCKOUT

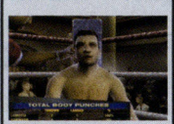
STAND-OUT MOMENTS



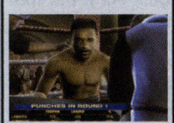
Muhammad Ali looks just like Muhammad Ali.



Joe Frazier look just like Joe Frazier.



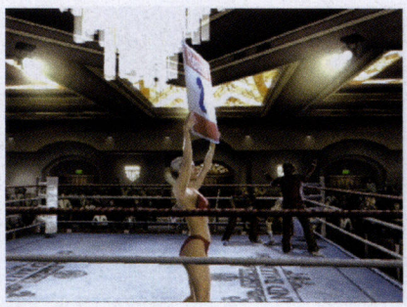
Jake La Motta looks just like Jake La Motta.



Sugar Ray looks just like Sugar Ray.

PLAYTIME





If you can manage to take your eyes of the lady, take note of the detail gone into the fighting arena. Nice, eh?



La Motta takes Robinson down. Apparently, Sugar Ray had overcooked Jake's steak.

GOOD POINTS

- ⊕ Features some innovative additions to the genre.
- ⊕ Great visuals and general presentation, right down to the cheering crowds.
- ⊕ Stars Muhammad Ali.



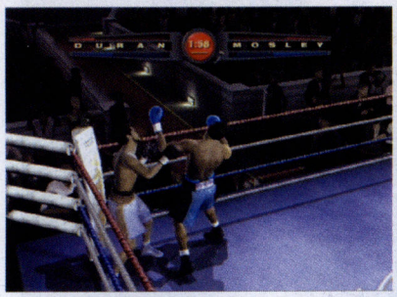


BAD POINTS

- ⊖ The movement of the boxers is far too awkward.
- ⊖ Rag-doll physics subtract from the realism of the game.
- ⊖ Stars Lennox Lewis.



The entrances are grand, although can sometimes contradict the personality of the boxer.



Mosley is so good he can deliver left-hand uppercuts without even looking.

I SEE THREE OF 'EM OUT THERE...

Fight Night's innovations don't start and stop with the TPC system, they also avoid the button-bashing cliché of recovery. Use the analogue sticks to line up the three images of the ref within the time-limit to continue with your beating, but be warned it gets a lot tougher every time your boxer 'trips on his shoelace'.



The first person perspective starts off with you seeing the ref in triple vision.



Gradually you have to bring the ref into focus using the analogue sticks.



The likenesses of the boxers is uncanny, it's just a shame that the objective of the game is to make your opponent look less like their real-life counterpart.

essentially a punch and kick genre without the kicks, and yet, to its credit, EA has given its best shot and come away with a TKO. That's TKO mind, because despite such welcome innovation, *Fight Night* is still a few gym-visits away from being a knockout.

The main problem is situated about five centimetres away from the right analogue stick. No, it's not your hand, but infact the left analogue stick. To put it simply, it's illogical captain. Push up, move right. Push left, move down. Push down, move... you get the idea. Why EA did this we'll never know, as it makes movement of your chosen head-beater painful. And that's painful in the kidney-bruising, pissing blood kind of way. Sounds a bit harsh, but when your boxer's face is in the middle of a meeting with an Ali flurry, you want to get out of there as quickly and as simply as possible. Unfortunately, *Fight Night* just doesn't let you.

Incredibly, another problem is with the rag-doll physics. Yes, that's right, the rag-doll physics. As much as we have enjoyed seeing Sonny "Ain't he ugly" Liston crash realistically against the ropes and then crumple to the floor, the rag-doll physics actually end up making everything decidedly unbelievable. A dramatic fall to the canvas is entirely welcome come the last minute of the final round, but when you've negotiated a knockdown in the first round and your opponent gets up after three seconds after looking like he'd just been delivered a left hook from God, the game loses a certain reality.

This is a shame because everything else in the game is about as lifelike as current technology will allow. The boxers, of which there are many, are extremely well-rendered and supported by some fantastic animation, alluding the fighter's various unique styles of body-bashing and yes dammit, even their personalities. The standard of each boxer is also a fair representation of how things would be if they were all in their prime today, with the exception of Lennox "All I can do is jab and play chess" Lewis, who is laughably on a par with Ali. In his wildest dreams, perhaps.

A solid Career and Create-a-player mode nicely round off a genuine oh-go-on-then-one-more-go game but the real fun to be had is in fighting on multiplayer. As innovative and as polished as *Fight Night* may be, its real success is in managing to capture just some of the thrill and drama found in the sport's glory days. ■

*Meaning 'good', obviously.

VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

Superb likenesses backed up with some tremendous character animation.

SOUND

Nothing new but, interestingly, there is a good use of silence in the game.

GAMEPLAY

Solid fisticuff-fun with some decent ideas that are very well implemented.

LONG TERM

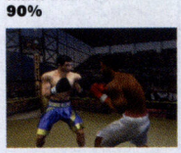
Nicely padded game with that will keep on winning you back.

OR YOU COULD TRY



ROCKY

Great license put to proper, glove-heroic use. A damn shame it didn't sell.
90%



KNOCKOUT KINGS 2002

Worse than *Fight Night* in every way. Still, it might be cheaper...
74%

SUMMARY

Visually it's everything we've come to expect from EA but it's the new fighting system that really surprises, dragging every ounce of blood-drenched fun out of the genre, let down only by some disagreeable movement controls and a flawed use of rag-doll physics.

81 PERCENT



MOJIBRIBON

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Sony | **DEVELOPER:** NanaOn-Sha | **PRICE:** $ Import
AGE RATING: N/A | **WEB SITE:** www.playstation.jp

1 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_A game that enables you to create your own lyrics.

_Sing the content of your e-mail.

_Creates slight bemusement to non-Japanese speakers.

PRIOR FORM

NanaOn-Sha developed *Parappa The Rapper*, *Um Jammer Lammy*, *Vib Ribbon*, *Parappa 2* and *Mojibribon*. We wouldn't be surprised if it also came up with the concept of 'wonder', 'happiness', 'irreverence' and a whole bunch others that our dictionary has yet to recognise.

IMPORT REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW (JAP)

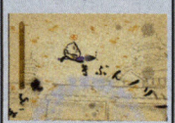
» IF THIS GAME WAS

A SONG IT WOULD BE IN GREEK

You can bob your head and smash a plate to it, but you just can't understand a word of it. It's all Greek, to you.

STAND-OUT MOMENTS


Level completed – here's the green stone!


Onion form: One more mistake and it's over.


Mojibri in a higher form of squiggle.


Flounder with the ink and you get smudged.

PLAYTIME





MOJIBRIBON

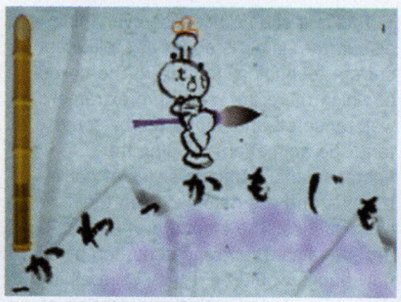
SURREAL JAPANESE INK MAN CHARACTER FOUND TO BE SKILLED AT DOING LINES

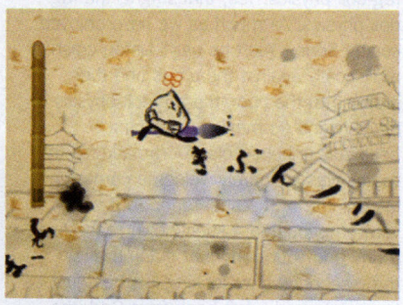
The importing of PlayStation 2 games: an exercise best described as a last resort of a desperate gamer or as something for connoisseurs. If you can penetrate the language you could be playing *Onimusha 3* right now, or you could wait until the end of the year for a PAL release. If you can penetrate the language you could be playing what is essentially the sequel to *Vib Ribbon* too. The game's based on Japanese writing, so it's fair to say your enjoyment of the title will be enhanced should you understand Hiragana. This 1200 year-old calligraphy style is the backbone of the game and as such, should put the iced rod of fear down the spine of any of you out there who don't know their Katakana from their Kanji. Well xenoglossophobics, do not fret since *Mojibribon* is just as playable as its predecessor even if it's incomprehensible to the uninformed. In fact, in actual, bonafide fact, in real, genuine, balls-to-the-wall honesty, it's still a joy to play.

Deep down inside we always knew it would be. It had to be, it's made by the pacifistic beatnik mother of invention behind *Parappa The Rapper* and *Um Jammer Lammy* and if there's one thing we know about Masaya Matsurra, it's that he makes games full of happy, happy, joy joy.

Abstract. It's all very abstract. And simple. Very simple. Mojibri is an ink splat that loves to sing the lyrics he writes. He does this by strutting on the spot as a circular series of clouds and stones revolve


What happens when a ink splay suffers an almighty prolapse.


Mojibri has already written this line, he'll sing it anyway until you come back to an unfinished passage. He so cool yes!


Gentlemen, we've all had days like this when the only way out is to love your woman the best you can.

GOOD POINTS

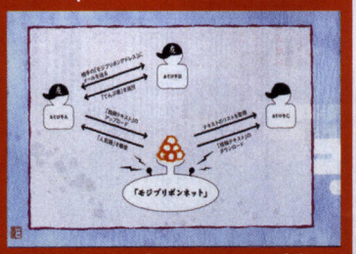
- Easy to understand but hard to master.
- Incredibly sweet to look at.
- It does feature some damn catchy tunes.

BAD POINTS

- Only up/down controls?
- It's in Japanese which would be fine except for the fact that we don't speak it.
- No bullet time.

JAP'N'EASE RULZ

Once you've remembered that the Japanese read from right to left, working out how to work the game comes easily – but it does require some patience. Don't expect the instruction booklet to help you any more than to remind you how different Japanese culture is from our own either. Check out this section and try and work out what it means. Clue: We've worked out that those orange circles represent how many lines of the song have yet to be sung. They sit on Mojibri's head as he struts. See, it's easy when you know how.

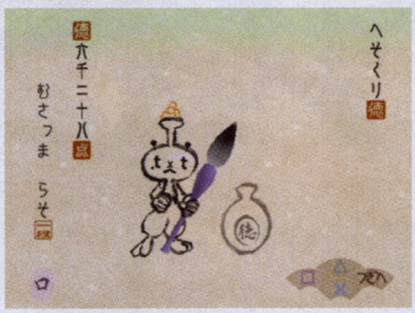


Is this instructions for a game or proof that limitless energy can be created by cold fusion? Both, probably.

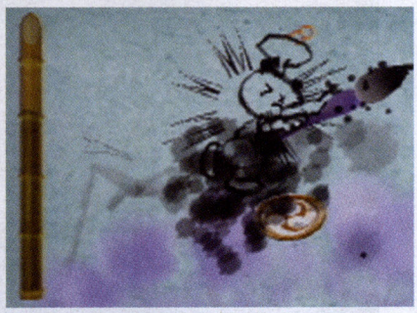




Each level's music has its own mood and style, all are catchy and all sound great played on headphones during a massacre.



The graphics are made to look as if painted on calligraphy paper so zero points for photorealism, then.



Don't ask why the background is full of random objects that fly about the place. To do so would be to dance with madness.

beneath his feet. As Mojibri writes, so his brush inks the clouds with letters that form words and sentences that, thanks to a rather spooky Hiragana-to-speech voice, sounds like Steven Hawking possessed by the bastard child of Kylie Minogue and a Teletubby.

Mojibri only has a finite amount of ink with which to write his sonnet. Ink is lost from his brush's reserve as you write, or if Mojibri fails to start writing at the start of a word, which will result him falling over a stone. Loose all your ink and you will devolve into one of two other forms. One regression sees you putting on weight, the next, and last, will have you pooped into your final onion/gonad form. Should Mojibri do well, he will evolve into what we can only be described as a 'higher self'. This is essentially Mojibri but as if he has been drawn as a religious icon. A nimbus surrounds him, he looks like a god – it works. Hmmm. Abstract stuff indeed, but then again – isn't love? Think about that one at least until the next paragraph.

All this brush on/brush off nonsense sounds rather complicated. But don't worry, it isn't, since using just one analogue stick and one analogue stick only controls the game. Push up to add ink to your brush, pull down to begin writing. As the rest is timing, that's it. There is a little more detail to it than that, but nothing that will make what is easily the world's simplest game any trickier to comprehend. As mentioned, if you're too late or early in starting your word you will fall over. If you stop writing too soon, you will lose the whole word, too late and you will smudge the last letter and loose points. Don't ink your brush and your writing will be light and scratchy, ink for too long and it will be too thick.

It's simple, but that doesn't mean it doesn't take a great deal of skill if you want to go for maximum score. And when you're low on ink and Mojibri is in his bulbous form, you only have one chance to get the last word or you'll lose – here you will know the meaning of tense. As with all timing/rhythm games, it's all about keeping your groove flowing. Get irate or let your sweaty thumb slip from the stick and you will flounder. This hurts.

As with other games by (orchestral chord) Masaya Matsurra, *Mojibribon* features many sweet touches that we'd suggest bring the title more in line with a piece of interactive art than something enjoyed purely as a game. Small detail – you can sing as one of three characters: Mojibri, a robot or a female Mojibri. Each character comes with their own evolutions and singing voice, but none represent as fundamentally huge an addition as the game's ability to read emails.

EACH CHARACTER COMES WITH THEIR OWN SINGING VOICE, BUT NONE REPRESENT AS HUGE AN ADDITION AS THE GAME'S ABILITY TO READ EMAILS

That's right, if you understand Japanese, have a suitable connection and want to email other Japanese understanding PS2 owners then they can 'play' your emails. Mojibri will sing them. You can earn the right to write your own lyrics too, which can only be seen as something resoundingly brilliant. If you can understand Hiragana.

We don't, hence the score. If (read: IF!) *Mojibribon* were to get a PAL release, Mojibri is going to have to have English lessons. But if you want to hear his true relaxing, hypnotic mild yet tense flava, get him on import. ■

VERDICT

LOOKS

Mojibri's face is made up of a 't', an 'x' and another 't.' Maximum points! Kind of!

SOUND

Steven Hawking singing like a openly gay water vole dancing to über funk. Good.

GAMEPLAY

Features "Can't talk and to hell with food – I'm playing" level of engrossment.

LONG TERM

There's plenty of fun to be had here – if only it understood emails in English.

OR YOU COULD TRY



PARAPPA THE RAPPER 2

Not quite as perfect as the first Parappa but it does feature "Romantic Karate." 80%



VIB RIBBON (PSONE)

Your CDs provide the beats as Vibri the rabbit dances his way to infinity. Total genius. 91%

SUMMARY

Originality meets simplicity in an ink well and we are very happy. If you see quality as being directly linked to the number of buttons used in game then you'll no doubt hate this little gem. Certainly not one for those in the *Manhunt* brigade.

79 PERCENT



TRANSFORMERS

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Atari | **DEVELOPER:** Melbourne House | **PRICE:** $89.95
RATING: G8+ | **WEB SITE:** www.atari.com.au

1 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Based on the *Transformers Armada* TV show.

_Slick 60hz refresh rate makes for smooth times.

_Only three selectable autobots.

PRIOR FORM

Melbourne House has been making games since the Eighties when it delighted us all with such 8bit classics as *Way Of The Exploding Fist*. Recently its been thrilling those who couldn't find a copy of *Splinter Cell* with the borderline lawsuit/homage that was *Mission Impossible: Operation Surma*.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

A MEMORY IT WOULD BE A NOSTALGIC ONE

You remember every summer as sunny but a time machine would show you that it did actually rain rather a lot.

STAND OUT MOMENTS

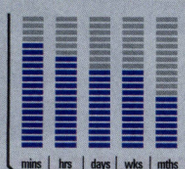

A dropship deploys the Decepticlones like mutated toy-marines.


See those mountains? They're real – you can climb them.


No videogame has ever given you such damn fine greenery.


Use the landscape to hide from a direct onslaught. Or get lost.

PLAYTIME





TRANSFORMERS

GAMEPLAY IN DISGUISE? HA! JUST KIDDING

One million years ago Cybertron... is a world at war. Yes, possibly the world's most uneducational toy gets film-length adverts, a new TV series in the form of *Transformers Armada* and now a game based on that very same show. One million years and they choose to disguise themselves as 20th Century vehicles? This is the exact point where we stop worrying about the show, toys or who would win in a battle in a no-holds barred romp between Hasbro and Mattel and state that we're going to treat this as a 'mech' game, pure and simple. Why? If we hear one more co-worker babbling words to the effect of "*Transformers*? Cool!" we're going to cry. Look, it's a mech game. Think *Armoured Core* meets *Gran Tursimo* with some of the most impressive landscapes the PlayStation2 has ever hosted and you've got the game. If you're a fan of the show then you're going to get more enjoyment, sure. The title uses the licence with zeal, the robots are beautifully rendered with an excellent sense of solidity, and they even have their own rag-doll physics. You've not seen a game based on a toy look this good, you really haven't.

Level one pulls no punches in demonstrating what the graphics engine can do. It's is a massive Amazonian forest, a forest with thousands of trees. Not tree-textured blocks, genuine tree-like trees just like momma nature makes. This vast biomass covers hills and valleys, real hills and valleys as well, not background bitmaps


Level two and it's time to quit your grinning and reach for the sunglasses to avoid becoming snow blind.


The lighting effects are spot on, giving perfect lens flair complete with the occasional rainbow.


The trees are great and the grass is the closest thing to sex we've ever seen but the game's just not a wower.

GOOD POINTS

- Whoa! Nice graphics!
- Excellent spatial sound effects.
- Nicely integrated controls that work well with the Minicons.





BAD POINTS

- Go here, shoot those, go there, shoot...
- Level variety is questionable.
- Get hit down mountain, reclimb mountain.



Behold Hotshot, Autobot from the planet Cybertron and fan of transatlantic 'dude' speak.



You may notice that there is more screenshots of this level than the others. Read the review for the reason.



Jumping is as cumbersome as you'd expect for a great big heavy lump of die-cast metal.

but a real landscape where you can travel anywhere you can see. We've never rated a game on its first level's topographical style but here we go anyway – ten out of ten. It's so swish that we want it used as the setting for more games. Hell, someone must own the *Rambo* licence. The possibilities for such a setting are endless and it does seem odd that the game that showcases its glory is based on giant robots that can transform into vehicles. But now for a more holistic approach to this review – we've got the stage so how about the play?

There are three Transformers to choose from; Red Alert, Hot Shot and the biggest mother trucker of them all, Optimus Prime. Each has its own rate of fire, top speed and agility and each can transform into their vehicular counterparts (an ambulance, sports car and big mother truck – respectively) at any time. These transformations don't give you any more abilities other than giving you a motor vehicle to control at the tap of a button with the choice of character being purely an aesthetic decision other than the general rule that the faster and more nimble your 'bot is, the less damage it can give or take. Speeding toward a herd of Decepticlones, the game's disposable-fodder versions of your enemies, the Decepticons, enables you to build up enough momentum to smash through them bowling ball style. Then you can flip out of vehicle form, skid to a halt as you spin round and bring your weapon systems to bare on the remaining disarray. When performed to the right crowd, this move will get the "*Transformers*? Cool!" reaction every time.

There's no doubt that that *Transformers* looks the part. Missile strikes feel heavy as the impact sends 'bots flying – you can even get punched from one end of the level to the other should you take a full force slap. Below this obvious excellence lies the actual game which, when compared to other 'mech' games, comes out as basic and lacking in depth. If you've ever circled an enemy while blasting away, then you get the idea of how simple and uninspiring this can be. By collecting power-ups, or 'Minicons' as the game calls them, you can improve your abilities and weapon set to the point where you can glide between areas, fire multiple rockets and even invoke a slow-motion mode where your shots are more powerful. This costs you energy and seems to be included because, hey, slow-motion is cool – right? Suddenly the beauty of nature isn't enough to carry this game into the classic realm.

Start level, go to waypoint, kill various Decepticlones and then fight a boss character. This is standard shoot-'em-up fare where you'll find yourself racing around on wheels, transforming and killing up close or from range (via a sniper mode, naturally) that's diluted by some additions that are far too clichéd. Level one is a forest, could level two be the snow level by any chance? Oh yes, a big blurry white snow section that can be seen as the exact opposite of all that was fantabulous about level one. After a few hours of play the excitement of level one still hasn't been built upon making you feel that your first slice of action will be much the same as your last. If you're looking for a *Transformers* game then you'll be more than content since the game is slick and full of action although it really is lacking any of the real smarts that make other 'mech' games more than the simple shooters they could be. While this is infinitely superior to *Robotech: Battlecry*, it's lacks the subtle mix of arcade and strategy that made *Gungriffon Blaze* such an excellent yet shabbier bargain-basket bargain. ■

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT IT LOOKS THE PART. MISSILE STRIKES FEEL HEAVY AS THE IMPACT SENDS 'BOTS FLYING

GREEN EYED MONSTER (TRUCK/ROBOT?)



You blow a fuse! Zing boom! The devil cuts loose! Zing boom! So what's the use? Wam bam!



Shhhh... It's oh, so quiet. It's oh, so still. You're all alone and peaceful until...

The game's first-person view mode enables you to move while shooting, an ability something Solid Snake is still waiting for. Not only can you zoom in, you can use a sniper-mode pick-up that enables you to destroy an enemy with a few well-placed shots to the head. These view modes are integrated well and allow for more tactical play as you use trees for concealment. It's like a Hasbro version of Vietnam. Maybe.

VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

It's a shame other levels don't match up to the first level glory.

SOUND

Nothing to get THX worried about but still solid with an epic score.

GAMEPLAY

Decent arcade controls provide instant fun that soon levels out as average.

LONG TERM

A good weekend spent fighting the Decepticons will reveal all the secrets.

OR YOU COULD TRY



GUNGRIFFON BLAZE

Looking its age but it still manages to give you a real sense of 'bot-rage'.
83%



ROBOTECH: BATTLECRY

More intense cel-shaded blasting that quickly descends into total pa-pa.
65%

SUMMARY

A stout and dependable title that initially seems groundbreaking but quickly comes to rest amongst better and similar 'mech' titles that have featured on the PlayStation2 since year one. Fans of *Armada* and great visuals have been served well though. Very well.

75 PERCENT



ALIAS

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Acclaim | **DEVELOPER:** In-house | **PRICE:** $79.95
RATING: M15+ | **WEB SITE:** www.acclaimau.com

1 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Official script and voice acting from the strangely attractive Jennifer Garner.

_Environmental weapons.

_Ten spy gadgets to use and let's face it, we can never get enough of them.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

A CONSPIRACY SHOW IT WOULD BE X-FILES SEASON 9

It started out great but now the whole conspiracy thing is a bit dull and as a result each episode just comes off as predictably average, just like *Alias* the game.

FIRST LEVEL

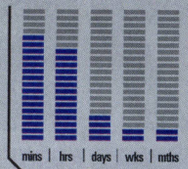

The opening level of the game has a true spy setting – a casino.


Your first task is to meet your contact who has a new toy for you.

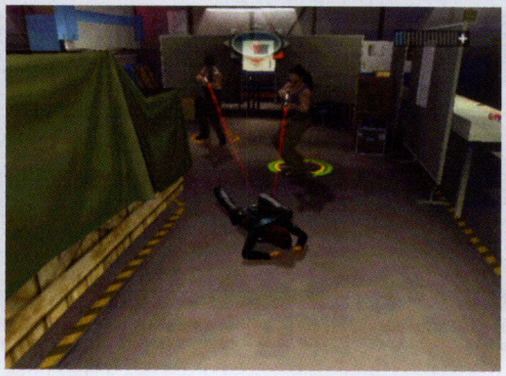

Using your cover as a waitress, you then have to spike a drink...


...which you then give to this gentleman. Objective one complete.

PLAYTIME




If she was *MacGyver* she'd be able to finish her mission objective in seconds using that hose and a hairclip.


Just to be on the safe side, the guards prod her body with some long red sticks. Oh no, hang on, those are supposed to be lasers, aren't they?

ALIAS

THIS GAME WON'T BE GARNER-ING ANY AWARDS

It was only a matter of time before *Alias* became a videogame. It seems like just about every other spy/conspiracy-based TV series has made the leap. Unfortunately for this particular franchise, it appears to be a leap of faith based entirely on the fanbase of the show. This certainly isn't aimed at any serious gamer.

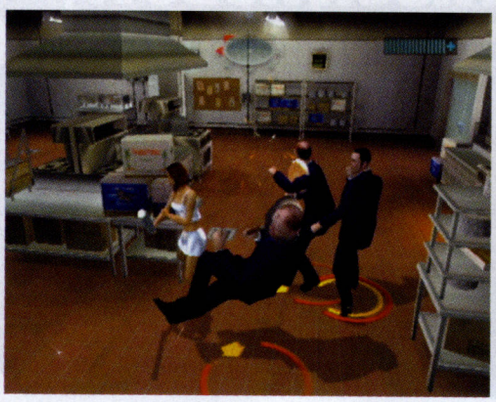
This game is by-the-book average. You've got your token stealth elements (although there are no body-hiding elements), some action moments and a healthy amount of uninspired gadget use, all of which fail to offer anything that hasn't been seen a gazillion times before.

This isn't helped by the fact that the game is, well, tedious. The action moments, when they happen, don't degrade into button-bashing – they're that way from the start. This is a shame because there are some very pretty moves you can perform – at one moment we smashed some generic goon's face into a nearby table, knocking him out cold. We'd love to say this was totally intentional, but it just kind of happened whilst we were alternating (read: bashing) between the attack buttons.

You're forced into this button rattling because the controls are generally quite clunky, something that is very noticeable when you're moving around. The animation itself is fine but the interaction with the environment feels very forced. For example, get to a door you want to open and you need to be right in front of the handle to open it. This is nothing compared to when you try to tackle some stairs – normally you can run freely, but when you get to a set of stairs it's tip-toe time. Worse yet, you always stand up on a set of stairs, completely ruining the chance for stealth in some areas.

If things do go wrong (as they frequently do in *Alias*) then you need not worry too much because there are regular save points and your health even regenerates. It's almost as if the developer knew the game was clunky to play, as you certainly don't need the health or save points – the game is far too simple anyway. Sadly, every single part of this game seems average and we can't help but feel that the fans are going to be let down. ■

THERE ARE REGULAR SAVE POINTS AND YOUR HEALTH EVEN REGENERATES





VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS
Occasionally surprises but doesn't exactly push the system to its limits.

SOUND
Some good use of music ruined by pretty lacklustre sound effects.

GAMEPLAY
Starts off promisingly enough, but gets far too boring far too quickly.

LONG TERM
You're going to have this one back at the shop long before completion threatens.

OR YOU COULD TRY

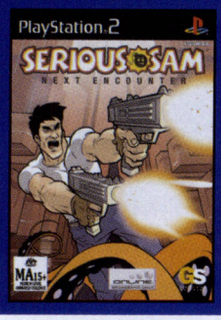

DARK ANGEL
A very confused game that doesn't seem to know what it wants to be.
49%


BUFFY: CHAOS BLEEDS
Play as Buffy, Willow and the other members of the Scooby gang. Great.
80%

SUMMARY

We can understand the 'attraction' for the *Alias* groupies but, in all honesty, we doubt that anyone would manage to stay with this game beyond the first level. It fails to excite and, more importantly, offers absolutely nothing original in the way of gameplay.

50 PERCENT



SERIOUS SAM: NEXT ENCOUNTER

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Take Two | **DEVELOPER:** Climax | **PRICE:** $49.95
RATING: MA15+ | **WEB SITE:** www.take2games.com.au

1-8 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Play with up to eight players online.

_Features 2 player split screen co-op and deathmatch modes.

_Set in different time periods including Ancient Rome, Feudal China and Atlantis.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

A GUN IT WOULD BE A GATLING GUN

Because like the M134 Minigun, M61 Vulcan or GAU-8/A Avenger it spews out more bullets than you can comprehend in a sickeningly short space of time.

STAND OUT MOMENTS



An abnormally quiet *Serious Sam* moment. Something's brewing...



That's more like it – a healthy body count aided by lead unleashed.



It's official – it's become a full-on killing spree of serious proportions.



You thought the kills would slow down? Ha! Not a chance.

PLAYTIME





A brain-thing on mechanical stilts and a huge explosion. There's nothing highbrow about *Serious Sam,* that's for sure.



Rotating platforms over lava, a yellow arrow pointing to a switch. It's strange what we take for granted in the world of videogames.

SERIOUS SAM: NEXT ENCOUNTER

IT'S A BLAST. ARE WE JOKING? NO, WE'RE SERIOUS

You've played this game before you know, or rather, you've more than likely played a game whose constituent parts could be cut and pasted neatly into one of *Serious Sam*'s poster-paint explosion levels. So have we – hell, we've even written this review before. So it's first-person shooter time again – one man against the entire bowels of hell. This time around though, the twist is that lead character Duke Nukem spouts dry, pop-culture soaked witticisms between expelling rounds of ammunition. Sorry, unread 'Duke Nukem' and re-read with the words 'Serious Sam' instead.

You can see where we're going with this, so we'll cut the joke short, because it's a slightly flawed analogy. In actual fact, *Serious Sam* is like a Jive Bunny Master Mix of old first-person shooters, say *Duke Nukem*, *Doom*, *Quake* et al but played back at 130 beats per minute, with a whole slew of additional samples thrown in for good measure. In many ways *Serious Sam* reminds us of a time when the latest PC first-person shooters were distributed as freeware – you played it to your heart's content for a while and either forgot about it or stumped up the cash for the final version. *Serious Sam* gets as close as possible to this ideal in today's market – it costs just $50.

YOU WON'T BE SIGHING 'THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO' AFTER PLAYING SAM

Going into detail on the various denizens, weapons or levels thrown your way in *Serious Sam* is a fairly pointless exercise as the inspiration for them drawn from countless games for a reason – to reinforce a feeling of nostalgic fun. But you won't be sighing 'they don't make 'em like they used to' after playing Sam, more 'they never used to make them like this'. Eye candy or break-neck speed? If your preference lies with the former then *Serious Sam*'s approach will leave you disgusted at the primitive visuals on offer. Players bred on a diet of 2D shoot-'em-ups will feel at home in a jiffy however; enemy speed and attack patterns recall the halcyon days of *Salamander* or *R-Type* and dictate a pace of play at odds with titles such as *Medal Of Honor* or *World War Zero* – back pedal, strafe, listen out for marauding beasts behind you and adjust accordingly. And watch the combos wrack up – the body count on offer is higher than any freeware first-person shooter, even with a relatively small one-player game – and to the power ten of anything released in the past few years, especially considering it's online play. Nope, they never made 'em like this. ■







VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

Shuns frippery for 60 fps. In terms of priorities, it's the right one.

SOUND

Comedic sound effects and a dose of rawk when the going gets tough.

GAMEPLAY

More RPM than we could imagine. Fast, frenetic and, above all, fun.

LONG TERM

Over in a relatively short jiffy, but it's kinder to your constitution this way.

OR YOU COULD TRY



TIMESPLITTERS 2

What the original *TimeSplitters* was supposed to be – if they'd had the time.
ISSUE 95 **94%**



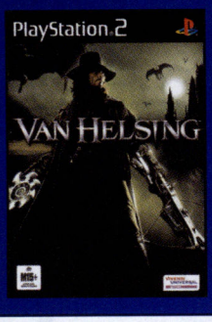
QUAKE III REVOLUTION

The classic arena based FPS in most of its glory, although now a bit dated.
ISSUE 75 **90%**

SUMMARY

Whether you regard it as an earnest homage or a blatant pastiche, *Serious Sam: Next Encounter*'s back to basics approach firmly reintroduces, if somewhat unnecessarily so, the shooter element of the FPS genre. There's no stealth, no squads, just serious amounts of good old action.

70 PERCENT



VAN HELSING

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: VU Games | **DEVELOPER:** Sapphire Studios | **PRICE:** $99.95 | **RATING:** M15+ | **WEB SITE:** www.vugames.com.au

1 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Based on Universal's blockbuster summer movie.

_Voiced by Hugh 'Wolverine' Jackman himself.

_Likenesses are excellent.

PRIOR FORM

We said this game was begging to be compared to *Devil May Cry*, and naturally, it has been. The big, bad characters that were anticipated are all here, making the game an unusually enjoyable romp through the world of the film. Nothing original, but then again, this isn't necessarily a minus point.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

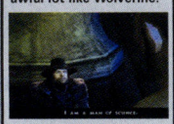
A FAMOUS INVENTOR IT WOULD BE ELISHA GRAY

Graham Bell invented the telephone. Coming in second with an inferior model has meant that Elisha Gray remains as nothing more than an imitator.

FIRST LEVEL



Introducing Dr Van Helsing. He looks an awful lot like Wolverine.



Despite the pistol he packs, our Van insists he's a man of science.

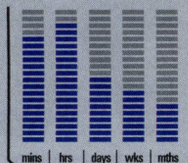


Mr Hyde is the first of the creatures Van Helsing encounters.



Turns out Hyde is a jessie at heart and he starts to run away.

PLAYTIME





Luminous green is hardly going to loosen your bowels but killing zombie-things is pretty damn satisfying.



The environments do add a gothic charm to the game, with this particular area looking like the inner-workings of Tim Burton's mind.

VAN HELSING

DEVIL WILL CRY

So you own the license for three of history's greatest and most feared horror villains. What do you do? Make a film of course, with lashings of special effects and that Jackman bloke who played Wolverine in the *X-Men* films. What next? Oh, you own a videogame publishing division. Well, you'd better start making the game of the film to bag those extra bucks from the console-owning public. What's that? The game's derivative rubbish; cobbled together out of other people's ideas and bits of leftover code? Who cares, it's already made us a mint. Looks like VU Games thought this through, but came up with a slight snag... Sapphire Studios had crafted quite a good game.

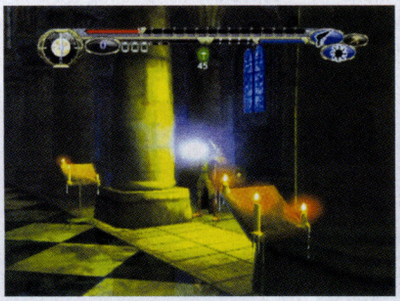
Van Helsing is in no way, shape or form based on historical fact. And we're pretty sure the radical thinking man of science from Bram Stoker's classic gothic tale, conceived out of the Victorian fears of purity and the need for a damn good scare, did not blow his enemies away with a six-shooter and explosive Holy Crosses. However, if games have taught us all one thing, it's that history is for books, and fantasy is best found roaming wild on the plains of the PS2. Curiously this ensures that the trite, bloodthirsty plot of *Van Helsing* slots neatly into its videogame counterpart. Basically, our Van is on a mission on behalf of the Vatican to rid the world of Dracula's dynasty, thereby assisting the foxy Anna, whose family has been on a similar task for generations.

ONE OF THE BEST FILM LICENSES COMMITTED TO CONSOLE IN YEARS. MAKE OF THAT WHAT YOU WILL

As the lead character actually resembles and was voiced by the Jackman himself, the game manages to immerse the player into the atmosphere of the film with aplomb.

Visually speaking, the high-achieving doesn't end with the character models, as the backgrounds are suitably foreboding and rich enough to impress the gamer and hold the atmosphere. Whereas the scenery isn't as great as – (plucking a name out of the air – *Devil May Cry*, this isn't too much of a problem as the focus of the game is on the action. Invisible walls are taken as a given in action games, perhaps so much so that they should be listed on the packaging, however, in *Van Helsing* they are particularly prevalent. The other major annoyance of the game is the way it loads around every corner, eliminating any sense of enjoyment that can be built up from the generally frantic action that forms the majority of the title.

In fact, in terms of actual shooting, stabbing and impaling, this is a top-notch title, as the fights bring new meaning to the overused term 'fast and furious'. Similar to the style employed by, you guessed it, *Devil May Cry*, our manly



The congregation started to turn tail and run when the so-called 'man of the church' pulled out his six-shooter.

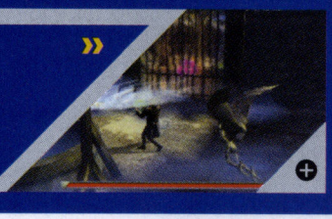


Buying new weapons with massive amounts of green glyphs encourages the player to smash open every last crate.



This ghostly fella is one of the least terrifying game-ghosts we've ever seen.

GOOD POINTS
- Plenty of action throughout the game with some awesome villains.
- Looks like the film.
- Sounds excellent.





BAD POINTS
- It's not *Devil May Cry*.
- Loading, loading, loading, loading, loading, loading, loading, loading.
- Becomes repetitive.

LICENSE EVOLVED

There are many elements to Van Helsing that have been created specifically for the game in order to flesh out the back-story to the film. However, this is not done in a pretentious *Matrix*-esque manner, but in a way that adds optional depth to the franchise. This game specific content comes in the form of new creatures, such as the rather disappointing stone gargoyles, banshees and fell spirits. We're also fairly certain that Van Helsing doesn't wander round collecting thousands of glyphs in the motion picture, nor does he come across a personal Gatling cannon.



Bring the glorious stone gargoyles down with your 'authentic' shotgun.



Got the shotgun, and we intend to use it with extreme vengeance. Vengeance for what, we don't know.



The monsters are nicely designed, getting the right balance between ugly and threatening.



Wow, collecting stuff! This is an amazing idea! Why has no one thought of doing this before?! We want to see this in every single game made from now on!

protagonist has to defeat hordes of undead foes through frantic combinations of pistol fire and blade-play. The list of attainable weapons is incredibly impressive, keeping the action varied and exciting right through the large number of levels available. However, it all boils down to the fact that combat doesn't feel as solid as the game it takes after. Once you've wielded Dante's enormous swords and flesh-shattering pistols, *Van Helsing* feels somewhat out-gunned.

This seems a real shame, as the developer of *Van Helsing* appears to have made a real effort with the presentation of this title, and for the most part, the folks at Sapphire have been incredibly successful. Hearing Jackman's voice in the game is a real plus, and this alone really sets it apart from the shameless cash-in crowd. The interaction between cinematics and action is well balanced, meaning that players never have to sit through hours of dull pondering and procrastination as the publisher seeks to squeeze the last drop out of the license. The creatures are truly hideous and inventive, well in keeping with the general mood of the game, making the admittedly repetitive action seem fresh and challenging at every stage. Rounding off the levels, the boss fights are incredibly *DMC*-esque, and as such, offer a different set of challenges to players who might be weary of hammering away at ⊙ for the last thirty minutes.

The one aspect of the presentation that does warrant attention, however, is the camera, which true to third-person shooter form, manages to make the game far less enjoyable than it really should be. Where action is concerned, this isn't such a problem, but when solving puzzles the camera can prove a greater enemy than Dracula and all his undead minions combined. Whereas this isn't the end of the world, it can become frustrating as the puzzles become more difficult later in the game. However, despite this and a few other niggling flaws, *Van Helsing* has to qualify as one of the best film licenses committed to console in the past few years. Make of that what you will. ■



An egg shaped hole. Wonder if that funny egg-shaped rock we picked up a while ago has any significance here?



Once you grow tired of collecting green stuff, why not start looking for red items? Variety is the spice of life after all.



The game's camera can be rather awkward at times, needlessly distancing you from Van's antics.

VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

Characters and backgrounds are solid without being outstanding.

SOUND

This is how licensed games should sound. Actually, make that *all* games.

GAMEPLAY

Repetitive and derivative, this is a poor man's *Devil May Cry*.

LONG TERM

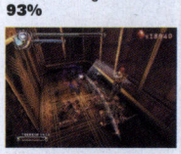
The game is lengthy and tough enough for a good, long play.

OR YOU COULD TRY



DEVIL MAY CRY

The original and still the best, *DMC* is the final word in this sort of action genre.
93%



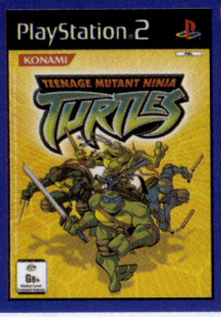
DEVIL MAY CRY 2

This second outing unfortunately saw Dante losing his touch a little.
82%

SUMMARY

Falls short of *Devil May Cry*'s sheer adrenal action, but avoids falling into the great chasm of money-spinning laziness that has ensnared so many recent film tie-ins. This game should be a decent enough treat for those finding themselves craving more *Helsing* after the film.

70 PERCENT



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Konami | **DEVELOPER:** In-house | **PRICE:** $99.95
RATING: G8+ | **WEB SITE:** www.atari.com.au

1-2 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_The turtles' names are based on renaissance artists.

_Originally the turtles started out as an ironic comic reacting against stupid comics about stupid superpowers.

_This game is totally unradical.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

AN ALBUM IT WOULD BE DIDO'S LIFE FOR RENT

Because it's the same brief few seconds of laziness repeated over and over again

STAND OUT MOMENTS


A crisp FMV introduces the ninja.

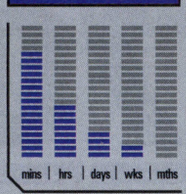

Here's Splinter. He's a giant rat.

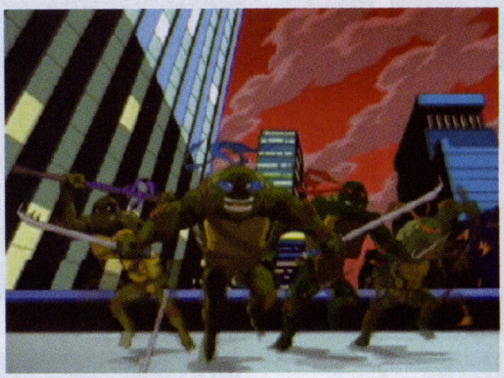

Here's the turtles. They used to be cool.



You'll welcome this particular screen.

PLAYTIME




Leonardo leads, Donatello does machines. That's a fact Jack. Raphael's cool but crude. Gimme a break. Michelangelo is a party dude. Party!!



These onomatopoeia lie. The action is not fun and it is not colourful. It is lame, repetitve and as impotent as a mutated turtle.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

T-U-R-T-L-E POOR! T-U-R-T-L-E POOR!

When Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman created the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* it was intended to be an absurd piss-take of the increasingly ridiculous climate of superheroes in the mass media. Of course, as is often the case, the irony got lost somewhere along the way to the bank. Consequently, *TMNT* became a massive hit in the Eighties and inevitably, a huge retro-phenomenon in recent years. Konami still holds the license to the oozed-up amphibians and so a videogame was equally inevitable. Unsurprisingly, it's still an irony-free franchise. Unfortunately, it's also a fun-free one as well.

Scrolling beat-'em-ups were at their peak around the time *Turtles* first aired so you'd be forgiven for thinking that Konami thought that the format was out of date by now. Sadly, this isn't the case. Seemingly convinced that a few cel-shaded characters, the ability to scroll up and down rather than merely left to right (thanks 3D!) and a *Point Break* vocabulary is all that's needed to resurrect the genre, Konami has really passed up the opportunity to do something even remotely mediocre.

By the time you get your particular fearsome fighter to their second batch of moronic hoodlums and robots, you probably would have mastered the two or three combos on offer and begun to wonder about a few things: Is this all there is to do? I thought these guys were ninja, why can't they act like it? Why is it only two player? Am I tired or is it just *that* boring? The respective answers are as follows: Yes, we have no idea, ditto and yes, it is just *that* boring.

TMNT is, however, still a pretty looking game with the cel-shaded style aping the heroes in a halfshell's latest animated incarnation very well indeed. The controls are smooth as well, although it would admittedly be pretty hard to ruin something as simple as the controls to what amounts to being nothing more than a scrolling beat-'em-up. And that, ludicrously, is it as far as *TMNT*'s positives go. Well, that and the following pun: hardly a reason to shell-out (groan) a cool $100 for a game is it?

KONAMI HAVE PASSED UP THE CHANCE TO DO SOMETHING EVEN REMOTELY MEDIOCRE

It's a shame that with the excellent *Transformers* on the shelves we have to be so violently reminded of the countless poor licenses that continue to plague the industry. It's worth considering that if Eastman and Laird had been videogame developers, they may well have made a game that spoofed generic videogame adaptations of TV programmes. Ironically, *TMNT* would be prime subject matter. ■







VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS
The cel-shading is nice, but limited environments don't allow the game to show off.

SOUND
Irritating voices strangely add character while sub-*Sonic 3D*-style rock is just plain ugly.

GAMEPLAY
Can't wait for *Streets Of Rage* on the Megadrive? Then this is for you!

LONG TERM
It can be annoyingly unforgiving but you just won't want to play this.

OR YOU COULD TRY


LOTR: ROTK
Semi-solid co-op sword-slashing fun of an obviously overrated license.
77%


DEVIL MAY CRY
A fighting-platformer that's so good even its sequel couldn't beat it.
93%

SUMMARY

Some nice visuals fail to disguise what is essentially a scrolling beat-'em-up, which wouldn't be a huge problem if it wasn't such a boring, repetitive one that fails to ever ignite into anything as cool or as fun as its license. Avoid as you would living in sewers.

51 PERCENT



WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Acclaim | **DEVELOPER:** Swordfish | **PRICE:** $79.95
RATING: G | **WEB SITE:** www.acclaimau.com

1-8 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

- It's based on the much-loved Jonah Lomu Rugby, probably still the best rugby game ever.
- Only the English and Welsh teams are fully licenced, though you'll notice some striking similarities between non-licenced players and their real-world counterparts...

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

A CUISINE IT WOULD BE CHINESE

Because it's very tasty and quite filling, but after a while, you find yourself wanting more.

STAND OUT MOMENTS

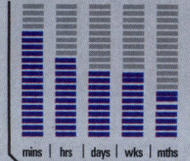

The try is on in the corner...


Playing the Kiwis is always good.


As is chasing the Poms.

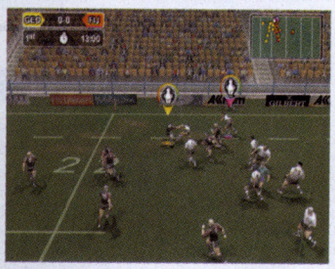

This is hard... but good when it works.

PLAYTIME





You'll get a pretty good view of the action and some handy instructions too. Very considerate.




The game makes it easy to figure out what to do, even if you're not a rugby tragic.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY

JUST WAIT TILL 2007...

Bloody Johnny Wilkinson. It was probably (though it pains us to admit it) fitting that he kicked the winning field goal that gave the Rugby World Cup to England... well played, the best team won etc. But what's really annoying is that although the English and Welsh rugby unions agreed to let their teams be licenced for World Championship Rugby, no other unions did. Union? Yeah, right.

But we're quibbling here. *World Championship Rugby*, based on the much-loved *Jonah Lomu Rugby* and brought to us by Swordfish, is a fine, entertaining game that favours fun rather than simulation. Still, it manages to do something that many Southern hemisphere teams (including the English) have trouble with – mixing up running plays with tactical kicking.

Rugby is a very technical game but Swordfish have done a good job of keeping things manageable. On-screen displays help remind you of the controls you need to use in scrums, rucks, mauls and lineouts. One weakness is goalkicking, either from the ground or on the run. The camera really doesn't help you much and we found it hard to get consistent results.

One area that can really help a sports title is that elusive thing known as atmosphere. Breaking it down, it's a combination of sound, graphics, commentary and 'feel'. World Championship Rugby doesn't really excel in any of these areas, but it's certainly a workman-like effort. The players aren't super-detailed but the animations are quite fluid and overall the game looks good. The crowd sounds dead – even when you're about to win an improbably, come-from-behind victory – and the commentary is quite low-key, but perhaps that's more a reflection on English commentary than on the game design.

BASED ON THE MUCH-LOVED JONAH LOMU RUGBY... A FINE, ENTERTAINING GAME

The game has plenty of modes to keep you busy. You can play friendlies plus leagues and campionships (due to the lack of a licence they can't call them by their real names) and, perhaps most interestingly of all, there are historical challenge matches. In these, you take charge of a team at a pivotal moment in a historic match and must meet a specific challenge (scoring in certain combinations etc). Definitely one for the hard-core rugby nuts.

Overall we enjoyed our time with *World Championship Rugby* and can heartily recommend it to sports game fans who want a change from soccer, baseball and gridiron. ■

VERDICT

LOOKS
Graphics that don't really push the PS2's hardware but still do the job.

SOUND
Definitely not the game's strong point. Where's the crowd?

GAMEPLAY
Definitely not a hard-core simulation but a bundle of fun nonetheless.

LONG TERM
Will keep you playing for a while but could offer a little more depth.

OR YOU COULD TRY



RUGBY 2004
A game that gets the pace of the game right, if not the technicalities.
78%


RUGBY LEAGUE
If you prefer the 13-man game – or even if you don't – this is worth a try.
70%

SUMMARY

It lacks a little polish, but overall we found World Championship Rugby is a solid, enjoyable game. Despite feeling rushed it offers a good game of running rugby – just the thing to beat those rotten Englishmen with...

80 PERCENT



SINGSTAR

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Sony | **DEVELOPER:** In-house | **PRICE:** $99.95
RATING: G | **WEB SITE:** au.playstation.com

1-2 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Vocals chords required although vocal talent is optional.

_Comes with two microphones.

_Could be absolute torture in the wrong hands.

PRIOR FORM

After EyeToy, this is Sony's latest attempt to get non-gamers to put money into the videogames industry and wrestle the periph-based gaming market away from the Konami. Ironically, *SingStar* will be released head-to-head with Konami's own *Karaoke Stage*.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

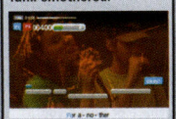
A DREAM IT WOULD BE THE ONE WHERE YOU GO TO SCHOOL NAKED AND EVERYBODY LAUGHS AT YOU

Because to get the most out of this game you'll have to not mind that dream.

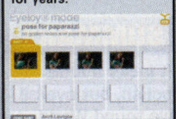
STAND OUT MOMENTS



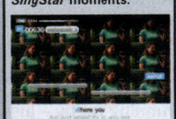
The locations are all incredibly stylised and funk-smothered.



You realise you've been singing the words wrong for years.

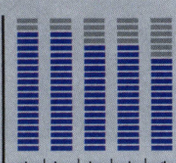


Take a snapshot of your best (read: funniest) *SingStar* moments.



Save your effort and play it back to a massively impressed household!

PLAYTIME







SINGSTAR

GROOVE IS IN THE ART

A warning to any PS2-loving gamers who share a house with 'fun' people (particularly girls): buying *SingStar* might in the long run equate to 'giving' your console to your housemates whenever they are drunk or bored. It'll make you popular, for sure, but you may never get a good night's sleep again. Y'see, *SingStar* is one of those games that will appeal to non-gamers as much as someone whose life revolves around videogames – perhaps even more so. We can see the scenario now – after arriving in from the pub, you think "I know, I'll show everyone *SingStar*", only to discover that you've inadvertently decided never to play any other game ever again, and to leave your PS2 in the living room permanently so that everyone can get to it. Of course, this is also *SingStar* 's biggest draw – that any idiot with the power of speech can get up and belt out a cacophonic rendition of *Take On Me* means that the game will not exclude anyone regardless of talent or confidence. And after listening back to a few of our own performances, **play**™ can only describe this as a good thing.

The set-up could barely be any easier to grasp: you choose a song and the accompanying video plays, with the lyrics displayed line by line at the bottom of the screen. All that's left for you to do is to sing along with the track as it plays, attempting to match each note up to the pitch meter running across the middle of the screen. As well as the standard karaoke Singalong mode and competitive and cooperative Multiplayer modes, the main feature of the game is Career mode, which requires you to travel from club to club, impressing the crowds and accruing 'Buzz' points until you can progress to the next level of notoriety – the ultimate goal being to pack out a stadium with your half-baked Daniel Bedingfield whine.

From a library of 29 songs – ranging from the early Eighties to the present day – there's bound to be something in here to get your juices flowing, as well as a fair few that will cut through you like a dentist's drill (*YMCA*, anyone?). Unfortunately, as Career mode allocates the songs to a particular venue, and prohibits repeated attempts at the same song, you're going to have to sing



Each location has six songs, but if you want to be a superstar you're gonna have to sing them all once – even Westlife.



Modern 'punk', characterised not by political dissatisfaction and the rejection of culture, but by misuse of the apostrophe.



This is the type of lifeless, spring-break-looking dive you'll be expected to perform in. Nice block colouring, though.

GOOD POINTS

- A proper party game that will without doubt be popular barbecue entertainment.
- Immediately enjoyable.
- A broad range of songs to choose from.

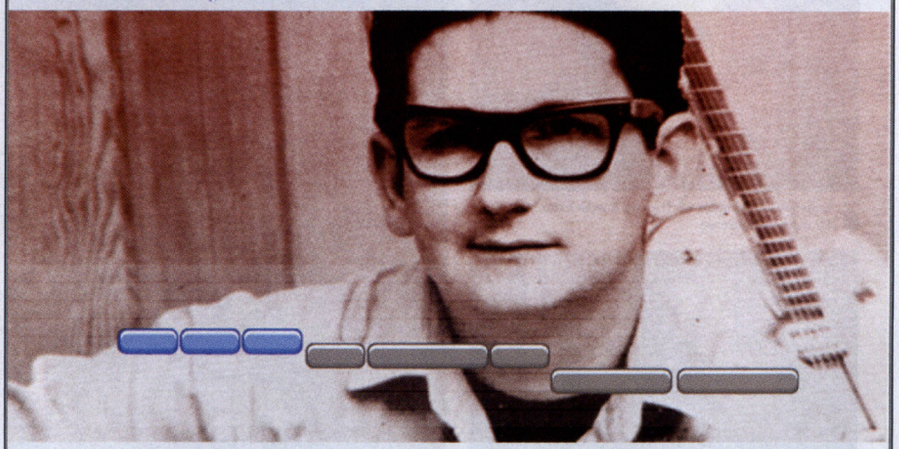




BAD POINTS

- Whaddya mean I've got to sing Dido?. Noooooo!
- Not as exact as you might have once hoped.
- Just one more song...





something that makes you want to gag sooner or later. Thankfully, there are no extra points given for singing the lyrics correctly, so in these circumstances you can just spit a torrent of abuse at the artist along to the tune of the song and still leave the venue to rapturous applause.

The lack of speech recognition also ensures that you don't have to pronounce any of your words properly, so if you can't read quick enough to keep up with the chorus to Busted's *Crashed The Wedding*, then you can simply mumble your way through. Equally, if you want to sing Dido's *Thank You* just like on the original record, you are permitted to project the notes directly from your nasal cavity rather than from the mouth. Class.

Songs can be replayed in their entirety, and saved onto a memory card for posterity. Sony has also included a couple of voice effects – Deep Daddy (which drops an octave, making you sound like the echoey ghost of Barry White) or a high-pitched chipmunk squeak at the other end

BUYING SINGSTAR MIGHT EQUATE TO 'GIVING' YOUR PS2 TO HOUSEMATES WHEN THEY ARE DRUNK OR BORED

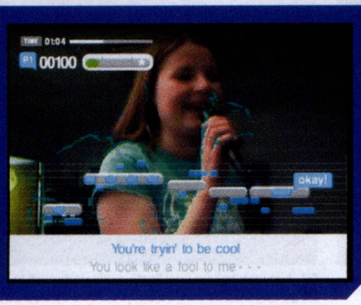
of the scale. You can also drop the original artist out of the mix and add reverb to your own voice, but all these options are so limited we can't imagine people playing with them a week later. Besides, nobody was going to buy *SingStar* for use as a legitimate music-recording tool – it's been designed solely for fun, and to this end it does a fantastic job.

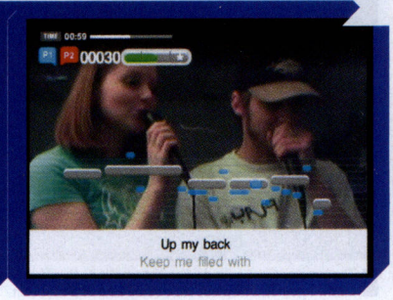
There are a few niggles, however. The first is that while Sony has worked hard to transcribe all the songs, the rigid structure of the stave design doesn't really allow you to warble or single with any flamboyance while being scored. And while most gamers would probably struggle just to hit any of the notes in The Darkness' *I Believe in a Thing Called Love*, anyone who fancies themselves as some sort of future-star may well feel their individuality is being watered down by a game unable to differentiate between eccentricity and error. Also the blobs on the screen that represent the notes are pretty fat, making it more of an approximation than expected, and therefore unlikely to serve any purpose as a vocal coach. It's a further shame that the Duet mode asks both contestants to sing the same vocal part rather than harmonise, but we were probably asking a little too much here.

As a complete unit, *SingStar* offers excellent value-for-money, including two microphones in the box for the price of a regular game – actually, come to think of it, that's the price of countless awful games as well – and it is hard to imagine that it won't be a resounding success for Sony when it hits the shelves. Even if it does feel a bit awkward at first. ■

VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR

As an extra bonus, Sony has made *SingStar* compatible with EyeToy, so you can watch yourself perform as you sing rather than view a song's promo video. Each song has a series of 'key' notes that need to be hit, at which point the PS2 will save a short video snapshot of your attempt to hit the note while looking casual. Sadly, unless you know the lyrics to the song you are reciting, each snapshot finds you looking at the screen rather than making some sexy eye contact with the camera, often leaving you looking bewildered and uncomfortable. Or maybe that's just us.





VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

Stylised locations and full motion video both flesh out the action adequately.

SOUND

Again does its job, but more replay options would have been welcome.

GAMEPLAY

You sing – that's it. If you can't do that then exchange the score for a zero.

LONG TERM

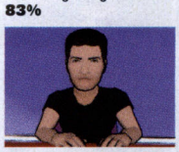
If Sony releases more song discs then *SingStar* should live forever.

OR YOU COULD TRY



EYETOY: PLAY

A wonderful experience that's surely tied to the future of gaming.
83%



POP IDOL

All the joys of bad singing without having to actually issue a single note.
61%

SUMMARY

***SingStar* treads new ground for a console title and does it with confidence and gusto, with the two mics being of surprisingly good quality. Despite being huge fun, however, it is less a game of skill than it is an excuse for everyone to get together and humiliate themselves in front of others.**

80 PERCENT



THE SUFFERING

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Midway | **DEVELOPER:** Surreal Software | **PRICE:** $99.95
AGE RATING: MA15+ | **WEB SITE:** www.midway.com

1 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_The splashed blood of victims adheres to our hero's shirt! Wow!

_Creatures designed by Stan 'I designed *The Predator*!' Winston.

_Features 'adult' language.

PRIOR FORM

Midway has been here all our gaming lives and we love them like a father. A father that has an embarrassing taste in music and a penchant for dancing at our parties, that is.

REVIEW

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

» IF THIS GAME WAS

A MOVIE

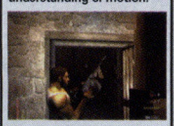
You'd probably rent it after you've sat through a weekend of drinking ethylated gin and watching all four *Phantasm* movies. Back. To. Back.

STAND OUT MOMENTS

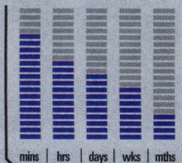

Voldo in his Venetian mask outfit. Don't worry, he's quite armless.


We've got a gun and the muzzle flare makes us believe we're in for a treat.


The movement pattern of the enemies shows a decent understanding of motion.


Man and machine, as God intended, but this time within a mediocre game.

PLAYTIME




Suffering with migraines? Then try Anadin Extra for quick, pain release.


Midway obviously thought that holy-goddamn-bright-red would be the scariest colour for blood.



THE SUFFERING

SWEET JESUS, THE SUFFERING

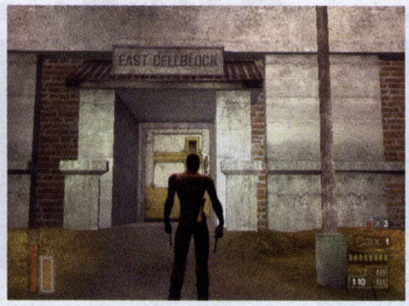
A brief digression; did you know we are currently living in the year when *Hellraiser VIII* will be released? The terrifyingly comprehensive Internet Movie Data Base shows that some reviewer has decided that it is a "Unique and good idea, and better than *Inferno* and *Hellseeker*." We haven't seen this film and as it doesn't exist, no one has, but that won't stop us suggesting that it will be the most effective use of a tired story arc, food dye and corn syrup you will ever see this side of a Mel Gibson take on the Qu'ran. At least it would be if this latest Midway bloodbath title were your only point of reference.

Midway don't hold back on the anti-hero front and start layering on the gloom early on. You play a man named Torque, a real Neil Young-look-a-like mother lover who's been placed on death row for brutally murdering his wife and kids. What follows is a heartfelt mediation on life/death and whether it is ever justifiable to kill that follows on where Krzysztof Kielowski's masterpiece, *A Short Film About Killing*, left off. Ha! Only joking! No, you're in prison surrounded by perpetrators equipped with propensity to profanity, these dudes just love to swear and we'd like to give a special nod to references to sexual intercourse with infants and slang for the female pudenda. Well hooray from games that aren't afraid to say "****".

Some of these foul-mouthed fellows reckon that your crimes require you to get beaten to death even though they know you're going to face a lethal injection anyway and we, the player, don't know if our on-screen counterpart is guilty or not. The lights dim, people start screaming as unnatural shapes twist out of the dark with knives for limbs and our hero finds himself let out of his cell with only a handy plot device to save him from yet another Clive Barker-esque bladed bondage death.

THE SUFFERING ATTEMPTS TO MAKE A ROUTINE THIRD AND FIRST-PERSON SHOOT-'EM-UP A TERRIFYING PROSPECT


The inmates were gutted when the prostitute they'd ordered off the Internet turned out to be some kind of bitch-beast.



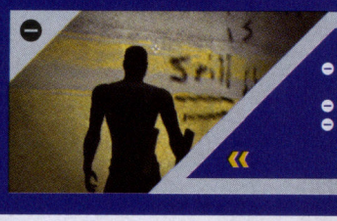
Just look at how well lit the cellblock is next to our dark protagonist. It's art we tell you, Midway style. Probably.


"I see dead people." Well, that's probably because you've just this minute killed them.

GOOD POINTS

- Main character can do an 'Altered Beast'.
- Interesting madness/ supernatural aspect.
- As damnation, it's at least not eternal – like *Spawn*.





BAD POINTS

- This is why people rant on about Nintendo so bloody much.
- Creature design by 'the numbers'.
- Invokes nothing but complete and total apathy.

INJECTED WITH A POISON

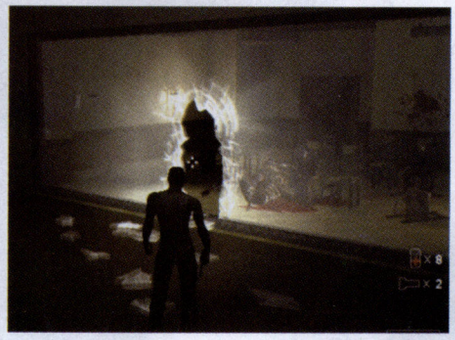
GOING TO HEAVEN THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

The game's menagerie have been designed with methods of execution in mind. One chap, for example, is a big bloated beast-type thing whose back is home for enough rifles to form a firing squad, the Voldo rip-offs refer to decapitation while the dude pictured shows the disgusting physical manifestation of the most humane of executions, the lethal injection. Lethal injection was introduced to the USA in 1977 and in twenty years it would have been used to kill 267 men and one woman, most of whom died painlessly and didn't suffer the indignity of having to point out a decent vein. The first country to emulate the US's groundbreaking method of judicial execution was China, a country famous in certain untravelled circles for taking on stroppy students with tanks. Show the way USA! George W Bush presided over 156 deaths when he was governor of Texas and stated that they were all guilty people. Leader of the free world, indeed.



So I'm stuffing you with Domestos – at least I was voted in.





Most games have a 'thing' and *The Suffering*'s 'thing' is that it wants to scare you. We know this is possible; we've played scary games. Problem is, *The Suffering* attempts to make a routine third and first-person shoot-'em-up a terrifying prospect by fading up the occasional bitmapped image of desolation. Although the design of the initial wave of demons follows the design of *Soul Calibur*'s Voldo and are therefore similarly gimp-like, they move like restless spiders where knives have replaced their limbs and have proven to be most effective in killing pretty much every hardened con and screw on the block. Your first weapon is a shiv, but it might as well be Thor's hammer. Not only can it slice through gimpish evil with a few swishes, it can also knock down damaged prison walls that have stood since the 18th century. This improvised blade is weapon number one; by the time you get to the Tommy Gun, slaughtering even the most contrived of demonic designs is as problematic as avoiding their set attack pattern (one beastie even has to turn his/its back to you to fire it's spine rifles) and hosing down firepower. And all the time spent making the blood stick to your grubby vest can't make this kind of interaction with hell scary. Thanks to your large arsenal of available weapons it's incredibly pedestrian, thanks to the slickless aiming controls it isn't strictly what we'd deem fun.

Would *Silent Hill* be at all terrifying if you could just kick a nurse's head off? Don't even imagine it since it may give you the impression that *The Suffering* is at least amusing when that simply is not the case. Once you've killed half a dozen creatures the rest become as differential as sprout number 6432H is to 6432F in the biggest bowl of lukewarm sprouts you've even been forced to eat. Horror, by definition, isn't boring. This, therefore, isn't horror. It's just a bloody mess tied together with a storyline that had potential. Ever notice how the word potential is almost always used as a positive when really it's a negative? Well, check out the potential of your main character's psyche. Not only does he see visions that spring up mid-game, he may well be barking mad – or possessed by a demon. Cool! Now this is an interesting premise. Interesting until you realise your transformation pops you into the scaly shell of the Swamp Thing on steroids, a gargantuan incarnation of all your primeval strength unleashed in the form of a toad-man whose beefy attack comes on like a kid in the schoolyard who seriously believes he can plough through a gaggle of bullies by swirling his fists. No doubt the game would have been eerier if you had transformed into a psychopathic school kid, but no.

This is as much fun as working in a butchers, if you happen to be one of those spooky automatons that stand in the window and carve meat for eternity.

play™ hint: Wes Craven's *Shocker* and Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* are now available as a VHS and DVD video double-pack somewhere in this universe. ■



The prison may be a dingy place but you can't fault its dedication to fly extermination. Just look at the Insecticutors.



What caption could possibly better the slogan to this poster? It's just not going to happen.



The warning on the wall actually states that 'thou shalt not worship false idols', but Torque doesn't care, he's just too cool.

VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

Tired creature design and clichéd horror settings. Ooh, an asylum!

SOUND

Decent doom-laden soundtrack, standard guns and annoying repartee.

GAMEPLAY

Yeah, kill all those bastards and if you get bored, you're most probably gay. Groan.

LONG TERM

A rare game that becomes more forgettable the more you play it.

OR YOU COULD TRY



MANHUNT

***Splinter Cell* with a totally different vibe – less variety, more fear and loathing.**



HITMAN CONTRACTS

Same control interface but slicker, darker and just plain better.
93%

SUMMARY

Is this listless or lacklustre? When a game breeds this level of apathy in the player, you won't even care. If money spent on games is ever comparable with money spent on movies, then this is the trailer of the film you'll walk out of the theatre during. Now, how much is that worth to you?

50 PERCENT

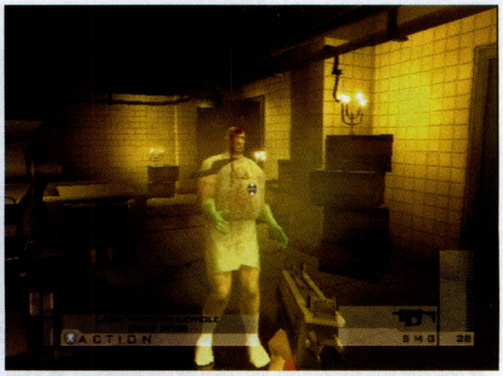




It's a testament to how great *Hitman* looks when it manages to make a room, post-sacrifice, look beautiful.



play™ had wondered what happened to its tip for the Caulfield this year. Let this be a lesson to you: never take a tip from a horse's ghost.



This person deserves to be shot if only to rescue him from that terrible comb-over job.







HITMAN CONTRACTS

MURDER, HE WROTE

Not since Lex Luthor decided to dedicate his life to trying to destroying Superman has a villainous bald man managed to capture our attention quite like *Hitman Contracts*' Agent 47. Despite being in essence, *Superman* meets *Dawson's Creek*, TV show *Smallville* managed to entertain thanks to fact that viewers were given an insight into Lex's haunted past, and tribulations that would turn snappy dressed businessman into a calculating supervillain. Similarly, *Hitman Contracts* takes us deeper into the psyche of Agent 47, an on-the-brink-of-death Agent 47 to be exact, as you play out flashbacks of the assassin's early hits.

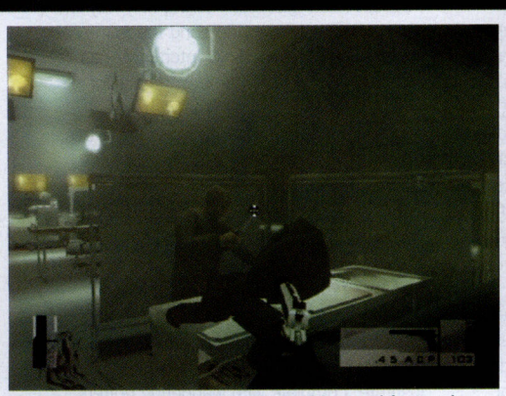
most celebrated rank attainable after the completion of a level is 'Silent Assassin', but if you want a body count closer to a Schwarzenegger/Stallone movie marathon, so be it. *Hitman Contracts*' strongest suit is the fact that you can play through each level with a different MO every time, or take a pick-'n'-mix approach – stealthily infiltrate a complex, but leave with all guns blazing.

To accommodate both a slow, stalking pace or a shoot-first, think later attitude, *Contracts* requires just a single control method – a first-person shooter style twin stick affair for intuitive moving and aiming, a 'creep' button and a holster weapon command to keep things

HITMAN'S IMPECCABLE PRESENTATION ENSURES THAT KEY MOMENTS STICK IN YOUR MIND LONG AFTER PLAYING

To create intrigue, a small dose of mystery never goes a miss, and a liberal measure is proffered by the game's opening level – Asylum Aftermath. The first room you find yourself in is bathed in bright, white light – a *Hitman* logo adorns the floor, slumped on it, a dead body with a streak of blood trailing. Around seemingly every corner, await Agent 47 clones in various states of deadness. A lot of questions need answering, that's for sure.

To find those answers you're going to have to shed some blood. Whether it's a small thimble full or a cascading river is entirely down to your proficiency as a hitman or thirst for gore. The sneaky. A quick click of the R3 button and your view flips from first to third-person. If you're fussy, two alternative control methods are available – a left-handed version of the default system and a simplified method. The third-person view is handy for observing the patterns of guards and potential hits and concealing yourself away in the shadows while the first-person view is preferable for blasting your way to freedom if your recon goes awry. It provides considerably more freedom than *Everything Or Nothing*'s lock-on based control system, and despite bearing many similarities with *The Suffering*'s controls, feels far smoother.



Next time the those greedy, greedy nurses and doctors ask for a pay rise we suggest the *Hitman* incentive: Do your job or die.



Some people sleep on their side, some only on their back, some, however, can only sleep while surrounded by blood and held at gun-point.



There's no Christmas snow to be found in *Hitman*, just the type of snow that makes it hurt when you breathe.



HITMAN CONTRACTS

INFORMATION

PUBLISHER: Eidos | **DEVELOPER:** IO Interactive | **PRICE:** $99.95
RATING: MA15+ | **WEB SITE:** www.atari.com.au

1 Player | Memory Card | Dual Shock 2

IN THE KNOW

_Uses 'revolutionary post-filter technology' for blur effects.

_12 levels set in places such as Britain, France and Romania.

_Includes 60Hz, Pro Logic II options and loads of death.

PRIOR FORM

"We can all relax in the knowledge that *Hitman Contracts* surpasses its predecessor in, well, every way and already looks to be one of the PS2 highlights of 2004." Preview, Issue 3

RE:VIEW

RELEASE DATE
30 APRIL 2004

WRITTEN BY
NICK POWELL

» IF THIS GAME WAS

A CONTRACT IT WOULD BE A MICHAEL DOUGLAS' PRE-NUP

Because not only do you secure yourself a scorching hot filly, but, if you're retarded enough to get bored of it you can drop it without any comeuppance.

STAND OUT MOMENTS

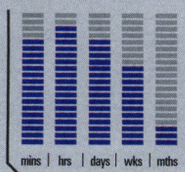

A stable full of whinnying horses keeps giving the game away.


A spot of weedkiller in the water should make things easier for us.


Not in the same keague as horse-decapitation but still pretty effective.


The key to the guy's cell is in the guard's smut-room by the way.

PLAYTIME



THROUGH THE KEYHOLE

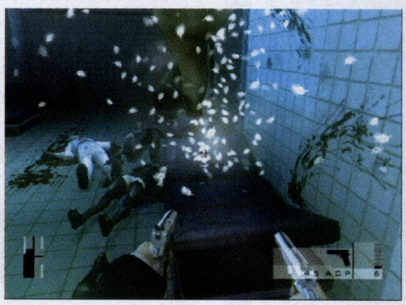
Hitman Contracts makes excellent use of context sensitive text commands to provide a number of actions at key points – be it concealing a meat cleaver in a chicken, yes really, picking a lock, climbing through a window or peeking through the keyhole. Not only would this make Sir David Frost and Lloyd Grossman swoon with delight – it also helps greatly in scoping out what's in a room, or just having a good old perv.


That'd be a shotgun then. Better tread carefully.


A bathing suit in the shower? Oh, come on.



Everything's so bloody neat. We prefer it when it's just plain bloody. Although this room does remind us of our old school canteen. Mmmm, chicken pie and mashed potatoes.


When making Silent Assassin is out of the question just shoot everything in sight. It is, after all, fun.


Go to page 58 of this issue, then look at this screenshot again. Now, which is really the better looking game?

If there's an area of *Contracts* that's slightly less convincing it's the animation of Agent 47 himself – from the third-person viewpoint he exhibits a strange 'skating' walk and swings his arms manically when grasping a weapon in first-person – this has little impact on control thankfully, but does deduct a certain *je ne sais quoi* from his otherwise formidable mystique. Also, when it comes to repertoire, old 47 is somewhat light on moves, especially since Sam Fisher of *Splinter Cell* fame is so accommodating when it comes to busting awesome stealth shapes. Ultimately though, this has little impact on the enjoyment *Contracts* offers.

The key to successful stalking is of course, patience, especially when infiltrating buildings where you'll be mingling with your potential hit's peer group. In these situations you'll have to look out for a lonely victim, creep up on him unawares, garrotte him – or perhaps settle for the swifter, and less painstaking shot from your silenced pistol – making sure that no one spots you, or just as importantly, hears you. Your victim's clothes can then be used as a disguise to allow you to fraternise in this foreign environment. If the corpse is discovered in the meantime, your cover will be blown and a new disguise will be required – another victim will be added to your tally, and any aims of becoming a Silent Assassin are dashed. Bodies can be dragged to less conspicuous areas, though your worries aren't over yet as people will notice if you're holding the wrong weapon, so keep them holstered until they're needed. Thankfully, you get a little more warning than a bullet in the back if suspicion levels are rising – it's called the Threat Meter, and the more wary people are of you, the higher it goes. If someone turns around and spots you with your strangling wire in hand you might want to put it away. This helps to keep *Hitman*'s learning curve perfectly pitched, meaning you'll only die because of your own stupidity or lack of patience. Another welcome factor is the well judged differences between the difficulty levels – the harder the setting, the less you'll be able to rely on your map for recon and the less you'll be able to save your game mid-mission. In fact, on the hardest setting, saving mid-way is completely disabled, providing a real test of your skills.

So far we've been pretty blasé about the wanton killing that goes on in the world of *Contracts* – throwing around the idea of garrotting people as if it's as emotive a gameplay element as kicking a football or driving a car. Thankfully it isn't. As we put it in our *Hitman Contracts* preview last issue, "People should be slightly disturbed. It shouldn't be so funny when you're killing people. It definitely needs to be a bit more calculated." And while we haven't come across any moments where we've felt any deep remorse for taking down a hit, each level has kept us firmly entrenched in the mindset of an assassin – killing willy-nilly will get your cover blown and send the game into anarchy. Thankfully IO Interactive has resisted, dousing the game with gore for gore's sake, creating a game with, we hesitate to say it, a mature tone. Put it this way – it shows up Midway's *The Suffering* for the juvenile drivel it is.

But beyond the considered approach and perfectly implemented controls, *Hitman Contracts*' impeccable presentation ensures that key moments stick in your mind long after you've switched off the console. The opening level for example, transforms from a clinical laboratory setting to a rundown institute, complete with wandering nutters

GOOD POINTS

- Multiple approaches to levels caters for both wannabe ninja and butchers.
- Weather effects, including mist, rain and snow, are stunning.
- Real-time reflections in mirrors and pools of blood.





BAD POINTS

- Agent 47's walking animation makes it look like he has rickets.
- 47 isn't the most athletic of videogame characters.
- No cross-dressing permitted.

and just a few SWAT teams' worth of Police milling around. The mood of the surroundings is suitably depressing, but spiced up by enough police officers to quell a small riot searching for you. Don a smock and pretend to be insane to slink past unhindered or kill a SWAT member, suit up and run around right under their noses. It's up to you.

There are a few occasions that your cover seems to be blown for little or no good reason, only for you to discover on a subsequent play through that you missed a vital item/object/switch/thing. Many players will be content to complete the level by throwing down and blowing all and sundry away, but we urge you to restart in search of that elusive Silent Assassin rating because there are so many strands to tie up and subtleties to discover, not to mention elements of real visual flair to soak up, that playing *Hitman*'s missions through multiple times is much more a pleasure than a chore.

While interior locations are generously detailed with lighting ranging from gloomy to floodlit and all manner of shades and colours in between, it's the exterior settings that really stun – and by 'stun' we mean genuinely elicit purrs of delight from viewers. Snow billows in the wind in the Alaskan level – it doesn't just look chilly, it sounds it too – when you step indoors the newfound hush and change in lighting almost makes you feel warmer. Cosy. Well, it would be if discovery didn't mean execution. Perhaps the most gorgeously presented level though is Beldingford Manor – a country residence of almost regal grandeur, draped in a cloak of night in the pissing rain. Moody. But IO Interactive is really spoiling us, because the first vista the player gazes at is Beldingford Manor's lake – a view you see a grand total of twice for about fifteen seconds before getting on with more pressing and more gory matters but it is painstakingly rendered – and we appreciate that. To stare out over the water is to know a videogame-imparted a sense of melancholy. We know we're sailing pretty close to teenage, angst-laden goth-wannabe melodrama here, but have you ever seen a moodier lake in a videogame before? Furthermore, the attention to detail on the rain effect even extends to drops striking the surface of a puddle causing ripples. It's all in the details.

IO INTERACTIVE HAS RESISTED DOUSING THE GAME WITH GORE FOR GORE'S SAKE, CREATING A GAME WITH A MATURE TONE

Use of music is equally on the ball, if less striking than the graphics, falling into the 'mood music' category. On occasions though, a few choice snippets of music are used with such aplomb that they transform a particular scene. For instance, a gruesome plot twist taking place on The Meat King's Party level is taken to sickening heights of depravity with the inclusion of *Put Your Head On My Shoulder* crackling through a nearby radio. On a later level, a rock song kicking in when a torture device is switched on adds an extra level of sadism. It's a damn sight more subtle than relying on a script that reads like having a fifteen-year-old that's just discovered Iron Maiden shouting in your ear. Sorry, that's another dig at *The Suffering*.

Hitman Contracts is simply the most atmospheric game we've played this year. In terms of overall presentation, it is beautifully accomplished, but more importantly, and it's becoming more and more rare these days, beneath this veneer lies a game that's enjoyable whether you approach it as a stealth specialist in need of a fresh and fulfilling adventure or simply as a mindless blast-a-thon. Or both. Unmissable.

MEET THE MEAT KING

There's something deeply wrong on The Meat King's Party stage – it's not just the assorted weirdoes in fetish gear, the fact that the bacchanalian is being held in an abattoir, the dead horse bleeding out hanging from a hook or the fact that Opium abuse is rife. No, it's actually the Meat King himself, who appears to be something akin to a cross between that thing in *Blade* and Fat Bastard from *Austin Powers*.



The Meat King lives up to his rather disgusting title.



Hang on, we've got a great idea for a screenshot/caption mega combo...



...Murder on the dancefloor. Badoom tish!



Arrgh! The neon lights are blinding us! We can't see! Don't panic. Just shut your eyes and shoot everything until you hear a scream.



Oh, come on. We're sure that SWAT school doesn't teach you to all huddle around a corner and get in each other's way.

VERDICT

VERDICT

LOOKS

All manner of clever effects contribute to a splendiferous looking game.

SOUND

Subtle use of sound throughout, intelligently used in key moments.

GAMEPLAY

Smooth controls, varied missions. 47's move set could be broader though.

LONG TERM

Attaining Silent Assassin status will require multiple attempts, unless you're us.

OR YOU COULD TRY



HITMAN 2

Baldie's first outing on PS2. Helped pass the wait until *Hitman Contracts*.
91%



THE SUFFERING

A bullied kid's idea of cool that just evokes complete apathy in the gamer.
50%

SUMMARY

Agent 47's air of cool actually makes us look forward to going bald. *Contracts*' stealth is more calculating, more spiteful and far more satisfying than *Everything Or Nothing*'s, while the atmosphere and maturity is light years ahead of *The Suffering*'s lowest common denominator approach to 'fun'.

93 PERCENT

PLAYLIST

GAME TITLE	SCORE	» WE SAY...
007: Everything Or Nothing	63%	Bond goes third person in another mediocre spy title
4X4 Evolution	72%	Average and annoying 4X4 racer
4x4 Evo 2	50%	Rather uninspiringly follows the tracks left by the original
7 Blades	46%	Short, shallow with spoiled visuals
Ace Combat 4	87%	Superlative sky-searing stuff – Namco comes good
Aggressive Inline	88%	A great way to spend a few hours
Airblade	78%	Hoverboard anarchy that needs to be set free
Aliens Vs Predator Extinction	41%	A deeply disappointing strategy. Waste of a good license
All Stars Baseball 2003	57%	A case of strike 2003... YOU'RE OUTTA HERE!
Alone In The Dark: TNN	72%	An enjoyable, albeit unoriginal, slice of survival horror
Alpine Racer 3	52%	Straight-down-the-line (ie middle-of-the-road) skiing, er, fun
Alter Echo	46%	A more purple and uninspiring platform shooter you won't find
Amplitude	91%	This is a worthy sequel to *FreQuency* and all-round top rhythm game. The visuals are absolutely stunning and suit the gameplay perfectly. However, it isn't quite as original as it seems to think.
Antz Racing	25%	If you buy this game you're an insect. Hah!
Ape Escape 2001	80%	Hilarious pant-based suck-'em-up, with cheeky monkeys
Ape Escape 2	89%	You is a monkey if you likes platformers but you don't buys this
Arc: Twilight of the Spirits	43%	Can you say "Generic"?
Arctic Thunder	13%	It's... wait for it... snow joke!
Armored Core 2	70%	Fights *Changing Rooms* and loses
Armored Core 2: Another Age	75%	Better than *AC2* for reasons we can't quite define
Armored Core 3	69%	This is one mech game for the hardcore.
Army Men: Air Attack 2	80%	*Desert Strike* for the young, lucky sods!
Army Men RTS	78%	Are we still dreaming? It's a decent *Army Men* game!
ATV2	84%	One of the better games to feature All Terrain Vehicles available
ATV Offroad	88%	Fantastically involving racing lunacy. Boring!
ATV Quad Power Racing 2	81%	Well-conceived racer with playable Challenge mode
Aqua Aqua	87%	A hugely addictive PS2 puzzler
Auto Modellista	76%	Enjoyable racing from the boys who delivered *Streetfighter*
Backyard Wrestling: DTTAH	72%	Decent wrestler but ultimately a poor man's smackdown
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	77%	*Gauntlet*, but with a brain. It's only a small one though...
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	82%	If Jerry Bruckheimer made RPGs...
Barbarian	73%	Reasonable but flawed beat-'em-up
Bass Strike	60%	Could've been good if the fish bothered to bite
Batman Vengeance	78%	Batman-lite that needs a little more freedom to truly fly
Batman The Rise Of Sin Tzu	68%	Limited but fun scrolling fighter
Battlestar Galactica	65%	Nearly great but far too linear
Battle Engine Aquila	90%	Mech fighting seldom comes more frantic than this winner. Although little more than a repetitive shoot-'em-up, it does burn so very brightly. If you want something in the same vein, try *Gungriffon Blaze*. Go on, you know you can find it if you look hard.
Beach King	47%	Bizarre buggy game, you do tricks in to impress women
Ben Hur	45%	Piss-poor effort with horses that look like they're made of Lego
Beyond Good & Evil	92%	One of the most original games to grace our console. It's quirky environments and bold narrative allow for some truly unique gameplay. Ubisoft offer some terrific visuals for the kodak moments of the game and then of course there's the talking pig...
Big Mutha Truckers	85%	Trucking good fun and no mistake
Black & Bruised	45%	Cel-shading aside, this is a P-O-O-R boxer.
Blade 2	65%	A momentarily original beat-'em-up that lacks real depth
Blood Omen 2	86%	Brooding vampire adventure like it should be
Bloody Roar 4	65%	Simple fighting fun. Just a tad too simple.
BMX XXX	52%	Mindless schoolboy humour inside the Mirra engine
BloodRayne	60%	Breasts, blood, 'Bullet-Time' and Nazis fail to mix together. How?
Bombastic	69%	The puzzleless sequel to the ace puzzler, Devil Dice
Bouncer, The	58%	A hugely disappointing beat-'em-up with some great graphics
Britney's Dance Beat	77%	Must-have for fans, little limited for everyone else
Breath of Fire Dragon Quarter	80%	Master the combat system for a short and tough treat
Broken Sword: Sleeping Dragon	xx%	Nice conversion from the PC. A bit dated though
Buffy The Vampire Chaos Bleeds	80%	Surprisingly playable TV tie-in that beats its Xbox daddy
Burnout	77%	A nifty but unbalanced racer which is best dipped into
Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	93%	A true must-have racer that sacrifices nothing to bring you levels of speed that will have your eyes begging to be shot. It's this style of play that made the genre great in the first place, now it's back.

GAME TITLE	SCORE	» WE SAY...
Capcom Vs Marvel 2	61%	2D fighting for the fan only
Capcom Vs SNK 2	95%	The beat-'em-up aficionado who wrote the review swore (often in a drunken state) that this is the fighting game to defeat all and who are we to argue? Well, it's only in, like, TWO dimensions – duh?
CART Fury	70%	Fast, fun and shallow arcade racing that's easy to pick up
CART Fury	70%	Fast, fun and shallow arcade racing that's easy to pick up
Castlevania	71%	What we expected but not what we hoped
Centre Court Hard Hitter	70%	The basis for a cracking tennis game
Centre Court Hard Hitter 2	69%	A sound follow-up to the original, but still no *Virtua Tennis 2*
Chaos Legion	71%	Hack and slash Japanimated nonsense that needs more depth
Choplifter	72%	Average rescue-'em-up that really needs something. Like guns
Circus Maximus	69%	Original multiplayer mode, unusual game
City Crisis	70%	A great idea that just doesn't have enough variety
Clocktower 3	72%	'Look at my little skirt. I can squat, too.'
Club Football	80%	If you value club stats over playability, this beats *PES3*
Colin McRae Rally 3	92%	A seamless journey from start to rally heaven, *CM3* is just what people who like timing themselves as they burn around country lanes have been waiting for. Unless they have a car and a stopwatch, obviously.
Colin McRae Rally 4	98%	There was no way that Colin wouldn't return to provide yet another nauseatingly good rally sim. The quality was nevitable, but still it amazes us.
Commandos 2	85%	Requires thought, punishes stupidity and is ultimately rewarding
Conflict Zone	65%	*Age Of Empires 2* does it better in every way
Conflict: Desert Storm	80%	Doesn't go far enough in exploring the subject matter
Conflict: Desert Storm 2	87%	Better in many ways but still oh-so-slightly politically incorrect
Contra: Shattered Soldier*	76%	Faithful updating of the classic series but very difficult
Crash Bandicoot: TWOC	73%	*Bandicoot* by numbers. It's okay, but lacks originality!
Crash Nitro Kart	51%	A game with all the vavavoom of Gran's deck chair
Crashed	66%	If the game actually did, we wouldn't notice. This is not good
Crazy Taxi	79%	Brilliant, but overpriced at £40
Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	53%	Great film
Dark Angel	49%	Nothing dark or angelic to talk about here. Just rather crap
Dark Cloud	80%	An inventive and fun RPG with a God-sim element
Dark Cloud 2*	92%	Actor/comedian Robin Williams named one of his daughters Zelda. What an idiot. Now we've got our own *Zelda*-beater, care of Sony and it actually looks like it's running on a modern gaming system – joy!
Dark Chronicle	89%	A combination of full power and pure, deep energy
Dark Summit	80%	A decent variation on the formulaic snowboarding genre
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	80%	Enjoyable, well-specified and colourful BMX stunts
David Beckham Soccer	74%	Poor game engine mars some quality game modes
Dead Or Alive 2	91%	Tactical combat with the addition of breasts that bounce in an impossibly amazing way. Though nothing when compared to *Tekken* or *Virtua Fighter*, it can still hold its own against games of flatter chests.
Dead To Rights	69%	Pure energy
Defender	80%	Intelligent update of a true classic
Def Jam Vendetta	87%	More fun than *Smackdown!* and with a far smoother soundtrack
Dennou Senki Virtual On Marz	69%	You don't remember me, do you? Pure energy
Destruction Derby Areanas	55%	On-line but off-target
Deus Ex	87%	Compelling Tech-noir thriller with slight speed issues
Devil May Cry	93%	Forgot how good this is? See the sequel – even that couldn't beat its majesty. Of course, if you want a brilliantly constructed arcade game you need a GameCube, don't you? If that statement is true, this doesn't exist.
Devil May Cry 2	82%	Polished but pales in comparison to the original
Dino Stalker	70%	Short lifespan hampers treat for G-Con2 owners
Disney Extreme Skateboarding Adventure	47%	Your little brother might like it, but we doubt it
DNA	42%	Had potential but, sadly, not the direction to capitalise on it
Dog's Life	79%	Pleasant fun that just never taxes
Dodonapachi Dai-Ou-Jou	82%	Ripped back to full throttle it delivers a blast of pure energy
Dog Of Bay*	90%	What happened to all the quirky Japanese games that were going to be released on these shores? If you find dogs in outfits who dance and sing as compelling as us, then get down to your importer's and get a copy of this. Unbelievably good
Donald Duck	56%	A below average platformer
Downforce	80%	Enjoyable F1 arcade racer, minus the F1 bits

arcade shoot-'em up | beat-'em-up | first-person shooter | party/puzzler | platformer | racing game | sports title | strategy/adventure

* Indicates an import review

PLAYLIST

TOP 5 PLAYSTATION GAMES EVER

1 GRAND THEFT AUTO VICE CITY



One of the many reasons Nintendo-philes hate you so very much.

2 METAL GEAR SOLID



We love the smell of cordite! Remake this with the *MGS2* engine please.

3 FINAL FANTASY VII



Aeris can't die. No, she can't be dead. How could she be dead. No!

4 PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2



The Great Game in a great game. Great.

5 GRAN TURISMO



Because you never forget your first time in the back of a Nissan Skyline.

GAME TITLE	SCORE	» WE SAY...
Downhill Domination	81%	Smooth, speedy fun with added violence
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	73%	A decent enough challenge that fans will definitely enjoy
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	59%	Huge fun for about one minute and thirty seconds
Drakan	83%	Control both dragons and heroines in involving romp
Driven	46%	Will drive you to a slicker, more enjoyable distraction
Driving Emotion Type-S*	58%	Upsettingly dull racer with hideous handling
Dr Muto	65%	Platformer-by-numbers. Enough to make ya sick
Dropship	90%	The best military combat sim on the PlayStation2
Dynasty Warriors 2	62%	Sleep-inducing hack-'n'-slash action
Dynasty Warriors 3 EL	81%	One of the better strategy fighting games
Dynasty Warriors III	69%	Big, bold and very shallow strategic fighting game
Dynasty Warriors 4	85%	Bizarrely compelling strategy fighter set in ancient China
Dynasty Warriors 4X	78%	How Add-on packs should be
EA Sports Rugby	80%	Fine game, but perseverance is required
Ecco The Dolphin	64%	Lacking clarity, Ecco takes a swim with the fishes
Eggo Mania	47%	*Tetris* 'update'. Sorry, that's listless *Tetris* wannabe
EJay	85%	Allows you to make music that doesn't suck quickly
Endgame	70%	Not terrible but lacks the polish to be essential
Enter The Matrix	80%	Better than the film... honestly
Ephemeral Fantasia	64%	Average RPG fair with added guitars but wah-wah
Escape From Monkey Island	80%	We have bananas today...
EX Billiards*	75%	Enjoyable pool fun with a twist
Extermination	80%	A solid horror debut for the PS2
ESPN Int Track And Field	83%	Competent button-basher
ESPN International Winter Sports	81%	Largely successful winter event-a-thon... with curling
ESPN National Hockey Night	57%	Exceptionally dull ice hockey game
ESPN NBA 2Night 2002	62%	Not as good as the worst basketball game on PS2
ESPN NHL Hockey	89%	Perfect translation of the sport
ESPN Winter Snowboarding 88	62%	A game that seems more bored than the player
ESPN Winter X-Games	65%	Staid, therefore ultimately tiring
ESPN X-Games Skateboarding	63%	A mediocre example of the skateboarding sim genre
Eve Of Extinction	64%	No multiplayer is the most heinous of crimes
Everblue	45%	A diving game. Actually make that a 'dull' diving game
Evergrace	45%	This is not the RPG we were looking for... move along
Evil Dead: A Fistful Of Boomstick	77%	Fans will love it, non-fans will buy *Silent Hill 3*
Evil Twin: Cyprien's Chronicles	43%	Irksome, dull and ugly. Chronicle that!
Extreme-G 3	87%	The fastest game the wold has ever seen!
Eye Toy: Play	83%	A lesson in original game design. Pure energy
Eye Toy: Groove	84%	Energetic, pulsing, ridiculous fun
F1 2001	76%	The graphics and the sense of speed are impressive
F1 2002	78%	Competent if unoriginal F1 game from EA. Er, again
F1 Career Challenge	89%	F1 just got reinvented courtesy of EA. Fine stuff
F1 Championship Season 2000	73%	Quick fix F1 thrills
F1 Racing Championship	71%	Falls short of being a pulse mover
Fame Academy	50%	More Sneddon than Alex
Fantavision	90%	This one came from the first wave of PS2 software, and does it show! Detonate the fireworks in the right order, earn points and end up on the moon. Not a classic in the *Tetris* or *Puzzle Bobble* sense, but still enough to help you pass the hours.
Fatal Frame II	81%	Disappointing, but still solid, sequel
FIFA 2002	65%	A disappointing entry in the series. Better luck next year...
FIFA World Cup 2002	80%	A good, solid football videogame that's worth a look
FIFA 2003	88%	Quality reworking of the *FIFA* franchise
FIFA 2004	89%	Glamourous footballer let down by flawed innovation
Final Fantasy X*	96%	Tenth time round and things are getting decidedly wetter than ever before. With astounding visuals that have yet to be beaten by *X-2*'s Pal release, mixed in with a refined combat, weapons and party system and you've got yet another beautiful game.
Final Fantasy X	94%	Easily the greatest RPG to grace the PS2 so far
Final Fantasy X-2	84%	The wonder is lost in this direct sequel
Finding Nemo	55%	Poorly executed, entertaining only thanks to Pixar
Fireblade	70%	Good ideas executed with no proficiency
Firewarrior	91%	Games Workshop made respectable by decent FPS engine
Flipnic	78%	Pinball and videogames melded with style
FMX	82%	Regarded by most as the best bike-based game around
Forbidden Siren	89%	Gaming greatness gets stabbed in the back by Limies
Formula One 2001	93%	Gentlemen, start your engines! F1 gets to the PS2 and we've still got a shed load of racing clichés to use. This one certainly keeps a perfect racing line and definitely deserves pole position.
Formula One 2003	78%	Pure energy and no mistake. Full force
Frank Herbert's Dune	45%	You will be amused – entirely for the wrong reasons
Freak Out	83%	A brilliantly inventive title that truly defies any genre
Freaky Flyers	54%	Poorly disguised karter offering a couple of hours of fun.
Freedom Fighters	92%	Possibly the finest team combat game available, this one is a brutal corker of a small-arms battle sim that begs to be completed from the off. It's by the people behind *Hitman*, yet it's of an even higher quality. Excellent.
Freekstyle	70%	A game too far for the *SSX* formula
FreQuency	82%	Hugely addictive, interactive musical gaming experience
Frogger Beyond	59%	A simplistic but addictive platformer
Frogger: The Great Quest	44%	More appealing when he just hopped and got run over
Fur Fighters	79%	Unoriginal but fun platformer
Futurama	67%	Full power and pure energy combined
G1 Jockey	65%	Overpriced but enjoyable horse racing title
G1 Jockey 3	73%	Worth it if you can find it cheap, and you like horses.
G-Surfers	70%	Plays a convincing Bruno to *Wipeout Fusion*'s Tyson
Galerians: Ash	73%	Disappointing mind f**k. Like bad drugs. We'd imagine
Gauntlet: Dark Legacy	60%	Turgid update of the classic coin-op
Ghosthunter	69%	Another great looking and very flawed game
Gitaroo Man	80%	Highly enjoyable four-player mode if a little short
Goemon*	50%	Wait for the English translation
Gladiator: Sword of Vengance	59%	10 years ago ths would have been really good
Gladius	58%	Just about average, turn based action RPG
Grandia II	69%	Engrossing story almost masks a run-of-the-mill RPG
Gradius III & IV	75%	Hardly classic enough to justify revisiting
Grand Prix Challenge	85%	Infogrames nicks pole position from Sony
Grand Theft Auto III	98%	Deriders will say that without *GTAIII* the PS2 wouldn't be so popular. So that will make it our new *Mario*, then? *GTAIII* is the first and only game to combine the feel of a top arcade racing game and a shoot-'em-up under an RPG umbrella.
GTA: Vice City	97%	"But it's just *GTAIII* with bikes and a killer Eighties soundtrack." Well, like, duh! This one scored a point less than the last simply because it wasn't groundbreaking. And doesn't it lose something for giving your character a name? Yes. The same one point.
Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec	91%	The ultimate racing sensation which, admittedly, is an awful lot like *GT2*, but with nicer graphics and tip-top handling. *GT4* is on the way, so please start writing your letters droning on about how it's just a racing game...
Gran Turismo Concept	79%	Stunningly beautiful but average nonetheless
Gran Turismo 4 Prologue	71%	Better off to wait for the real thing
Gregory Horror Show: Soul Collector	78%	The most perfect rental ever
GTC Africa	77%	A solid but unoriginal arcade racer from Rage
Guilty Gear X	80%	An enjoyable, if slightly flawed, old-skool fighting game
Guilty Gear X2	72%	2D beat-'em-up which should please fans
Gumball 3000	75%	Party girls and cars make for shallow but fun racer
Gunfighter 2	86%	Faux *Time Crisis* in the Wild Wild West
Gungrave	69%	Beautiful Manga animations can't disguise a shallow shooter
GunGriffon Blaze	83%	A short but exhilarating blast
Hardware	90%	Tanks and broadband come together at last in this riotous online shoot 'em up. Hugely addictive, shell exploding fun that, whilst let down by a poor ranking system, offers up to fifteen opponents in over five online arenas.
Half-Life	89%	Brilliant yet no longer quite so breathtaking
Harry Potter	50%	If these were a 'Quidditch' they might just be of worth. Ha!
Harry Potter Quidditch World Cup	42%	It makes a good mini-game
Haven: Call Of The King	86%	Multifarious and expansive aren't the words for this huge game
Headhunter	75%	An enjoyable adventure let down by some rough edges
Herdy Gerdy	80%	Incredible looking yet incredibly frustrating
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	91%	All the thrill of playing a cloned bald man who knows how to use many weapons. The first game to use rag doll physics to a decent degree is one tough killer of a title that requires more thought than action.
Hunter the Reckoning Wayward	60%	No where near as much fun as monster death should be
I-Ninja	80%	As fun as cute, psychotic ninja can be

arcade shoot-'em up | beat-'em-up | first-person shooter | party/puzzler | platformer | racing game | sports title | strategy/adventure

* Indicates an import review

GAME TITLE	SCORE	» WE SAY...
ICO	90%	One game that we can say is truly beautiful, poetic even. The save-the-girl-and-solve-the-puzzle theme gets sweetly blended in a previously unseen level of atmosphere and emotional contact, to make this a true modern classic.
Indiana Jones: Emperor's Tomb	75%	Decent combat let down by average puzzles
Indy Car Series	41%	Ovals aren't fun. One of the worst racers on PS2
Initial-D Special Stage	85%	Near-perfect conversion of cult racer
International Superstar Soccer	75%	More *FIFA* than *ISS*
International League Soccer	87%	Bored with the established players? Try this substitute...
Iron Aces 2: Birds Of Prey	40%	Shabby, dull, tired, mayday, MAYDAY!
ISS 2	79%	Lacks depth, but good fun nonetheless
ISS 3	69%	The beautiful game has lost its looks
Jade Cocoon 2	70%	Fairly engrossing despite its superficial banality
Jak II: Renegade	92%	Added guns and a darker tone make for a superb sequel that improves on the original in every way, but doesn't everyone prefer Daxter? Still, this one makes all young pretenders seem like they were programmed for a lesser machine. Vexx anyone?
Jak And Daxter	91%	A highly polished take on the previously stale third-person platform game that manages to balance its cuteness against a backdrop of reasonably mature action. Naughty Dog certainly knows its genre and this is a perfect example.
James Bond Agent Under Fire	94%	Produced by the same man who gave you *MOH Frontline* and similar in quality and scale. It may not be *GoldenEye*, but it still manages to capture a certain 'Bond-ness' to a decent degree. Oh James.
James Bond: Nightfire	90%	Captures the Bond spirit wonderfully well
Jeremy McGrath Supercross	30%	It made us super-cross
Jet Ski Riders	60%	This will sink without trace and rightly so
Jonny Moseley Mad Trix	40%	You'd be mad to buy it!
Judge Dredd Vs Judge Death	79%	Some nice 2000AD touches keep this one above average
Jungle Book Groove Party	89%	Entertaining and polished dance game
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	80%	More 'original' than 'philistine'. More stuff like this, please
Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer	64%	Gnarly waves and laid back style don't levitate this above the mundane
Kengo: Master Of Bushido	83%	Intelligent and original adventure
Kessen II	84%	A beautiful to watch, great to play strategy game
Kingdom Hearts	90%	Square meets Disney in the mind of a deranged storyteller. It couldn't work, it shouldn't work but it does and even manages to make Goofy seem like a pretty tough guy. Even those who find Disney disgusting should have a look.
Kings Field: The Ancient City	23%	The most frustrating game of the issue. Crap
Kill.switch	70%	Too little of great thing
Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	87%	A small yet beautifully formed platformer
Knockout Kings 2001	63%	A bit poor for PS2 – solo play only
Knockout Kings 2002	74%	A better update but still flawed, especially in two-player
Kuzushi Hype, The	59%	Arkanoid clone that's expensive at import price
Kya: Dark Lineage	71%	There's fun to be had but in a done-it-before kind of way
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	81%	Decent instalment to the aging franchise
Legaia 2: Duel Saga	55%	RPG-by-numbers with unusual fighting system. Still naff though
Legends Of Wrestling	53%	Incredibly tedious, non-event of a wrestling game
Legends Of Wrestling II	62%	Flawed wrestler for the die-hard fan only
Legion	57%	King Arthur turned in his grave. Twice
Lego Drome Racers	73%	Sedate in comparison to *Wipeout* and *Burnout*, but not awful
Lego Racers 2	87%	A fun-filled, well-structured cart racer with universal appeal
Le Mans 24hrs	89%	Competence personified, a fine racer which deserves attention
Le Tour De France	69%	Patience will determine your success or failure
Lethal Skies	79%	Acceptable airborne antics best off bought at discount
LMA Manager	88%	Little change over the PSone, but still as addictive as hell!
LMA Manager 2003	89%	Most up-to-date version of the best management game
London Racer World Challenge	45%	Almost competent racer that is sure to fly from bargain buckets
LOTR: Fellowship Of The Ring	72%	Something that Tolkien fans should enjoy
LOTR: The Two Towers	78%	Beautiful to look at, but slightly repetitious to play. Contains elves
LOTR: The Return of the king	77%	What we say is irrelevant. This is going to sell.
Lotus Challenge	72%	Licensed racing that'll test your skill and patience
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	69%	"I'll have some pure energy, please." Full power, sir
Madden NFL 2001	91%	The definitive American footie title
Madden NFL 2002	91%	If you understand and appreciate the rules of American football then this is the game you need. Everything is here with the usual sheen you'd expect and it works brilliantly. Those with just a passing interest may find it hard going.
Madden NFL 2003 96	85%	Plenty here for the hardcore fan of the chess-like sport
Madden 2004	89%	Another totally acceptable foray into the world of armoured rugby
Mad Maestro	76%	Simple, daft and fun but should be cheaper
Mafia	65%	A no thrills, gangster gaming experience
Magix Music Maker	63%	Flawed, but with the ability to entertain
Manhunt	30%	Pathetic
Mark Of Kri	78%	Extremely well-presented, if rather short, hack-'n'-slasher
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2	82%	Capable if unoriginal fix of 'extreme' BMX thrills
Maximo	85%	An extremely polished 'homage' to the classic series
Maximo VS The Army Of Zin	85%	A sequel to *Maximo* in every sense
Max Payne	83%	It lets you shoot scumbags in slow motion
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	68%	Move along. There's nothing to see here
MDK2: Armageddon	74%	Nice, but not nearly slick enough
Medal Of Honor Frontline	92%	From the initial shell shock of the beach landing through the narrow streets of urban Holland, this one has slightly more atmosphere than gaming genius, but it still packs a hell of a punch to the FPS gut.
Medal of Honor Rising Sun	81%	Frontline without the Private Ryan but with Pearl Harbour
Megaman X7	62%	An updated downgrade for the franchise
Men In Black 2	62%	Too limited and shallow to warrant serious attention
Metal Gear Solid 2 (NTSC)	77%	Self-indulgent and rushed, but still *Metal Gear*
Metal Gear Solid 2 (PAL)	81%	Bigger code that still can't live up to its own hype
Metal Slug 3	90%	Ponderous 2D sprite animation making most delectable yet
Metal Arms Glitch in the System	80%	Robot on robot action. Good humoured battling
MGS2: Substance (Import)	78%	Far more interesting and playable than the original game
Micro Machines	65%	Something little that doesn't go a long way
Midnight Club II	82%	Arcade racing takes the PS2 online
Midnight Club Street Racer	77%	'Best when dipped into' racer
Midway Arcade Treasures	80%	An eighties arcade centre on a disc
Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing	20%	An absolutely listless piece of software
Ministry of Sound: Interactive Edition	70%	This is not a game we play...
Minority Report	70%	Shallow if pretty beater that bears little resemblance to the film
Mission Impossible Operation Surma	65%	Frustrating use of a good licence
Monsters, Inc	65%	The game really doesn't belong on a PS2!
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	84%	Certainly not im-Mortal, but still highly playable
Moto GP	78%	Addictive though imperfect biker
Moto GP 2	58%	No attempt has been made to fix the flaws of the original
Moto GP 3	69%	Motorbikes driving round sparse, characterless tracks
Motor Mayhem	69%	*Twisted Metal* for the uninitiated
Mr Golf	69%	*Everybody's Golf* for the PS2, which, ironically, appeals to fans only
Mr Moskeeto	72%	Almost essential but let down by control and design issues
MTV Music Generator	89%	Any musical inclination? Buy it!
Music 3000	89%	Simple, yet well rounded, 'choons' creation. Blingin'
MX2002 featuring Ricky Carmichael	73%	Adequate racing but the competition is stiff
MX Superfly	79%	Fans of the original should note that this is superior
Mystic Heroes	70%	*Dynasty Warriors*, but aimed right at ickle kiddies
Navel Ops	74%	If you're looking for something different, this is good stuff
NBA Hoopz	68%	Outdone by the PSone version!
NBA Jam	70%	It was cool once. And that was enough
NBA Live 2001	80%	Spot on sim, if that's your bag
NBA Live 2003	82%	Best version of the series so far
NBA Live 2004	85%	Realistic trey shooting, board grabbing fun
NBA Street	85%	Slick and street tough basketball authority boyee!
NBA Street Vol. 2	90%	Slam-dunks other basketball titles
NBA 2K3	82%	Decent but nowhere near as fun as *NBA Street 2*
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	80%	Fast, but it doesn't take *Burnout 2*'s cigar
Need For Speed Underground	82%	Average racer. Looks funky though.
Next-Generation Tennis	57%	Painfully clear it's not how it should be
Next-Generation Tennis 2003	69%	Energy for those who don't require it
NFL 2K3	87%	Bloody American sports sims. Better than average though
NFL Street	65%	Big and brash with nothing going on upstairs. A jock of a game
NHL 2001	82%	Imperfect but hugely addictive!
NHL 2002	89%	New-found brains with some redesigned brawn
NHL 2003	87%	Not strictly new, by the best update money can buy
NHL 2004	89%	It's good – they always are
NHL 2K3	87%	Fun and rewarding, this is a sports game to be treasured
NHL Hitz 2002	90%	Insane hockey that's a delight to play. Body-check it out!
NHL Hitz 2003	90%	Yet another quality title from the *Hitz* stable that manages to add more style and speed without sacrificing a single drop of the action and excitement of an arcade hockey game. Even those who couldn't give a puck should take a peek.
NHL Hitz Pro	89%	Keeps the innovation on ice, but still very good
Ninja Assault	70%	Fair translation of a rather boring arcade game
No One Lives Forever	80%	Fun and amusing shooter that lacks depth
NY Race	55%	A nice concept that's let down by its poor implementation
Oni	72%	Enjoyable but flawed adventure
Onimusha Warlords	91%	Overseen by the people who gave you *Resident Evil*, this action adventure manages to break away from the tired *RE* dynamic and head toward a style of action/adventure that would reach its pinnacle in *DMC2*.
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny*	90%	Much better than the original, according to our reviewer, and he should know, he's never out of his Kimono. Same quality static backdrops, refined puzzles and action link fingers to give the best yet – until we get Jean Reno.
Operation Winback	60%	Flawed but tolerable stealth title

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PLAYLIST

GAME TITLE	SCORE	» WE SAY...
Orphen: Scion Of Sorcery	61%	This could have been fun
Outlaw Golf	78%	Funny and good
Pac-Man World 2	60%	As average as it can be without going BEYOND average
Parappa The Rapper 2	80%	Parappa again, same as ever, only easier!
Paris Dakar 2	57%	Average and very basic racing
Perfect Ace	50%	Energy, but not in its pure form
Peter Pan: The Legends Of Never Land	63%	It wears its consumerism cash-in badge with pride
Pinball	62%	Budget in price, gives a reasonable flick to the balls
Pirates; Legend Of Black Kat	59%	Even for kids this is a real act of piracy
Polaroid Pete	80%	Those looking for the weird will find much to like here
Police 24/7	80%	Top shooting action – a nice complement to *Time Crisis*
Poolmaster	87%	Competent yet fun pool sim
Pop Idol	61%	Average
Portal Runner	40%	Are we going to be swayed by a girl made of plastic? No!
Pride FC	69%	Unless you're stupid you should buy other beat-'em-ups
Prince of Persia	**92%**	This is a game that tries to do nothing new and proves a big point by doing so. You don't have to try anything 'zany' to make a good game, you just have to do what you do well. Sands Of Time does this, and it does it with wonderful ease.
Project Eden	**91%**	More of a puzzle game than an action blaster, this one requires you to use the various skills of your team to overcome obstacles and kill the hell out of a group of nasties. We haven't seen this style of game done so well since *The Lost Vikings*.
Pro Tennis WTA Tour	63%	Bog standard women's tennis sim
Premier Manager 02/03 Season	65%	Original idea that doesn't really work this time around
Premier Manager 03/04 Season	60%	Good match play, bad menus
Primal	69%	Wander about, then just makes you wonder "WHY?"
Prisoner Of War	79%	Exciting, yet aggravating – saved by true originality
Pro Evolution Soccer	97%	The best, most accurate football game ever made
Pro Evolution Soccer 2	**98%**	*FIFA* is a decent simulation of football, this IS football. Perfect handling (to those who will bother to learn it) and slick action. Yes, the player and team names aren't correct, but you can fix those with our previous cheats discs.
Pro Evolution Soccer 3	**97%**	Keeps getting better and better. Smooth gameplay that gives for the most realistic game of football you can get without having to put on muddy boots and actually exercise. Almost as good as beating ze Germans 5-1.
Project Zero	85%	Extremely well-done subscriber to the survival horror genre
Pro Rally	60%	Old-fashioned, but good enough for casual fans
Quake III	**90%**	Admittedly this couldn't even hold a sparkler to *TimeSplitters 2* in terms of size and durability, but it still manages to provide excellent multiplayer, but this time with the power of gibbing.
R-Type Final	89%	A classic shooter gets a sympathetic resurrection
R: Racing Evolution	84%	Eventually this is great fun
Rally Championship	85%	Fast, playable and challenging but lacking in atmosphere
Rally Fusion	73%	Challenging and different, but still in need of a polish
Ratchet & Clank	90%	Great fun for the young at heart
Ratchet & Clank 2: L&L	82%	Polished and playable without any originality
Rayman M	30%	A game that not even the fans will forgive
Rayman Revolution	70%	Fun luvin' platform adventure
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	88%	Nauseatingly numpty, but platforms fans'll love it
RC Revenge Pro	78%	Novel but moody racer
RedCard	78%	Hugely entertaining Vinny Jones-'em-up
Red Faction	**94%**	It's like playing Arnie in all the best bits from his movies given the look of *Total Recall*. With no squad system to cloud your view and some excellent action set-pieces this one is certainly a pulse-quickener.
Red Faction 2	89%	Flashier and more violent than the original, but not better
Ready To Rumble Round 2	83%	Massively enjoyable, if simplistic
Reign Of Fire	80%	Needed that extra couple of months in development
Resident Evil Code: Veronica*	85%	More a reworking than a revolution
Resident Evil: Dead Aim	56%	It amazed us that they still can't mix *Resi* with a lightgun
Resident Evil Survivor 2 Code Veronica	63%	An almost totally wasted opportunity
Return to Castle Wolfenstein	**92%**	Bits of *Medal Of Honor* go head-to-head with bits of every classic id game to create one of the most addictive and enjoyable FPS titles on the PS2. Slick, smooth and fast, FPSs don't get too much better – lacks multiplayer though.
Rez	73%	Competent shooter that eventually caves into confusion
Ridge Racer V	89%	A highly polished if unoriginal racer
Riding Spirits	72%	Plenty here for less demanding race fans to lap up
Ring Of Red	83%	Involving strategy, tense gameplay
Roadkill	81%	As decent as vehicle combat games can get at the moment
Robin Hood Defender of the Crown	69%	Just like the original. Make of that what you will
Robot Warlords	56%	Robots on a go slow
Robotech Battlecry	65%	Worth a look at reduced price
Rocky	**90%**	A far more exciting version of pugilism than *Knockout Kings* or the terrible *Tyson* effort that has the added bonus of having more *Rocky* in it that you would think possible. A brilliant use of a licence.

GAME TITLE	ISSUE	SCORE	» WE SAY...
Rogue Ops		60%	If better versions of this game didn't already exist...
Rolling		48%	A real jackass of a game
RTX Redrock		69%	0-30 in 8.28 secs. Pure energy
Rygar		79%	Acceptable reinterpretation of the '86 arcade game
Rugby 2004		78%	An authentic take on the sport. Less fun than footie?
Rumble Racing		84%	A fun, if slightly repetitive, racer
Rune: Viking Warlord		50%	Trite Viking saga that belongs in the dark ages
Runabout 3		34%	Doesn't even get you from A to B
Salt Lake 2002		37%	Lurchy steering and poor physics
Scooby-Doo Night Of 100 Frights		70%	Decent and playable but in no way original
Scrabble		60%	Like playing *Scrabble* against Will Self
Secret Weapons Over Normandy		82%	Terrific dog-fighting fiasco
Socom: US Navy Seals		87%	The PS2's first online game is a beauty!
Scorpion King		52%	Tripe smothered in gruel and then dipped in tripe again
SEGA BASS Fishing Duel		61%	Shouldn't we have fishing games that are perfect by now?
SEGA Soccer Slam		55%	Rather flat experience that's best avoided
Shadow Hearts		71%	RGP with some good features and major flaws
Shadowman 2		65%	Disappointing follow-up to a disappointing original
Shadow Of Memories		89%	Intelligent and original adventure
Shadow Of Zorro		39%	The most un-*Zorro* game you're ever likely to play
Shaun Palmer's Pro Snowboarder		86%	Accessible yet tough snow-sliding fun
Shinobi		70%	A fair attempt at the annoying 1980s coin-op
Shox		87%	A decent arcade racer
Shrek Party		58%	A lacklustre piece of fun
Silent Hill 2		73%	Retreads old ground – pretty darn scary though
Silent Hill 3		78%	As scary as being locked in by unlockable doors
Silent Scope		81%	Highly tense, innovative shooter
Silent Scope 2: Dark Silhouette		68%	An inappropriate conversion of an already short-lived game
Silent Scope 3		82%	Old-skool thrills and kills at last worthy of the name
Silpheed: The Lost Planet*		57%	Mindless blaster with limited appeal
Simpsons Road Rage		86%	Like starring in your own episode, this is *Simpsons*-tastic!
Simpsons Hit and Run		81%	Hardly original, but a fun game that stars Homer
Sky Odyssey		**91%**	What games does Sony make? Well here's one and it's a stunner. Fly various planes around fantasy worlds. The joy here, like in all great games, is in the handling, so expect to spend hours simply enjoying your plane's abilities.
Sky Surfer*		35%	An exceptionally poor boarding game
Slam Tennis		77%	A game tennis fans alone will appreciate
Sled Storm		80%	Another fun title from the 'BIG' team
Sly Cooper		80%	Raccoon means "he scratches with his hands." We love that
Smash Cars		65%	Totally unnecessary
Smash Court		80%	Frustrating and annoying yet painfully addictive
Smuggler's Run		80%	Smuggle it into your cove as soon as possible
Smuggler's Run 2		66%	A pleasant engine and promising context
SOCOM: US Navy SEALS*		84%	Fun single-player – we can't wait to test it online
Soldier Of Fortune – Gold		75%	Not the best but a contender for the goriest FPS
SOS: The Final Escape		79%	Thinking person's adventure that's neither epic or disastrous
Soul Reaver 2: Legacy Of Kain		76%	Solid and lavish, but so unfulfilling
Soul Calibur II		**94%**	If you like the idea of fighting a simulated sword battle on your PS2 then there is only one choice. *SC2* is as perfect an addition to the genre as we have ever seen and everybody, even pacifists, needs to own a copy.
Space Channel 5		80%	Ulala and Jacko in super cool 'Simon Says' game
Space Race		71%	Sufficiently placatory, if ultimately throwaway device
Speed Kings		70%	A *Burnout 2* clone, on bikes. Very average
Sphinx		80%	Another from the fun-platformer production line
Spider-Man: The Movie		79%	Follows the age-old movie conversion formula but it's still okay
Splinter Cell		83%	More stealth than *MGS2* and none of the guff
Simpsons Skateboarding		38%	Duff!
Sonic Heroes		71%	A mediocre resucitation of the light-hearted platformer
Splashdown		**90%**	The game that gave us that water effect and some top-notch water-based racing fun. Not quite *WaveRace 64*, but a hell of a lot less fuzzy round the edges. Until *Splashdown 2* pops its head above the surface this is as good as it gets.
Splashdown 2		71%	Acceptable Sea-Doo racer that replaces goofy fun with realism
Spy Hunter		**90%**	Midway takes the vertically scrolling classic and interprets it into 3D while managing to make a new game that plays like it was designed during the arcade heyday. We were genuinely surprised at how good this was.
Spyhunter 2		36%	Something terrible must have happened...
Spyro: Enter The Dragonfly		73%	Slightly low-key entry considering he's a dragon
SSX		**93%**	EA Big drops snowboarding bombs on all our moms with this early showing of how a PS2 game could look. Forget what you have learned from the PSone's *Cool Boarders* series, this is 'the one'.
SSX3		**94%**	Finely tuned snowboarding game that is so near perfect, EA is going to have to spend

arcade shoot-'em up | beat-'em-up | first-person shooter | party/puzzler | platformer | racing game | sports title | strategy/adventure

* Indicates an import review

GAME TITLE	ISSUE	SCORE	» WE SAY...
			a lot of time shopping for an idea on how to make this better. The most complete extreme sports game yet.
Starsky & Hutch		84%	If you have a Gun-con and a wheel, this is a laugh
Star Wars: Bounty Hunter		70%	*Star Wars* 'Jangoism' that'll only be a must for fanboys
Star Wars Starfighter		92%	Oh George? We don't want to fly your new craft. We want X-wings and TIE Fighters – you don't need to release any new films either. Still, dull new craft or not, this is still an excellent space shoot-'em-up.
Star Wars Jedi Starfighter		89%	No new surprises, but still great fun to play
Star Wars Racer Revenge		84%	Playable and atmospheric, but lacks depth
Star Wars: The Clone Wars		55%	Bad missions that fail to foster *Star Wars* emotion
Star Trek Elite Force		72%	Soaked in the atmosphere of the licence
State Of Emergency		80%	Violent arcade fun that's great in small doses
Stepping Selection*		70%	Reasonably fun, but limited, dancing game
Street Fighter EX3		33%	Time to call it quits for this old dog!
Stitch Experiment 626		48%	Nothing here we haven't seen a thousand times before
Stuntman		85%	Frustrating, compelling and addictive game
Sub Rebellion		74%	Involving underwater shooter that isn't sub-standard
Suikoden III (Import)		82%	RPG fan fodder
Summoner 2		83%	Better than the original and well worth a look
Super Bust A Move		80%	As great as it ever was...
Superman: Shadow Of Apokolips		59%	Even a Man Of Steel would find this hard to put up with
Super Trucks		69%	It's a cliché, but this is one for racing fans only
Surfing H30		46%	You'll be surf-board in no time
SWAT Global Strike Team		79%	Just like the real thing. Which is ultimately just a job.
Swing Away Golf		70%	Strangely charmless, yet adequate
Sword Of The Samurai		80%	Intelligent fighter that improves as the fight prolongs
Taz Wanted		76%	Fair attempt to translate the wee devil to the digital world
TD: Overdrive		78%	Nothing speaks volumes except its average-ness
Tekken Tag Tournament		85%	Enjoyable addition to the family
Tekken 4		91%	Namco finally delivers what *Tekken Tag* failed to. The finest version of the series, which is so fine you wonder where it can go now. Then you see *Soul Calibur 2* on the horizon and everything becomes clear.
Tenchu: Wrath Of Heaven		93%	Made by a team which loved the original, yet acknowledged the general duffness of the sequel, number 3 finally brings the series back together. We wanted number 1 with the graphics of a PS2, we got more.
Terminator: Dawn Of Fate		85%	Slick yet unoriginal slice of gaming that Arnie fans will lap up
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines		51%	Deserves to be terminated
Tetris Worlds		65%	Reasonable version that's way overpriced
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003		88%	Golf's top dog returns with another eagle
Theme Park World		85%	Weathered classic with knobs on
The Italian Job: LA Heist		84%	It's *Midtown Madness* on the PS2
The Getaway		83%	Big 'f*** you' to anti-videogame violence
The Great Escape		75%	Decent enough adaptation of the movie classic
The Hobbit		60%	The least fun part of LOTR in a game
The Hulk		69%	The Bentley Rhythm Ace of gaming. Pure, pure energy
The Sims		89%	A great existentialist work of some magnitude
The Sims Bustin' Out		89%	A great existentialist work of some magnitude
The Thing		85%	Retains all the hallmarks of the movie
This Is Football 2002		74%	Below average thanks to unappealing play
This Is Football 2003		55%	Finer in concept than in execution
Thunderhawk: Operation Phoenix		85%	Quick-fire chopper action that needs faster loading times
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2002		89%	More addictive and fun than golf should be
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004		83%	Quite simply the best golf game in existence bar none
TimeSplitters		90%	Get that PS2 multi-tap now
TimeSplitters 2		94%	We're still amazed how complete this game is, so if you're looking for pure quality first-person shooting underlined with VFM then this is your one stop. We've spent a lot of time pondering this but here it comes – better than *GoldenEye*.
Time Crisis 2		90%	Is this really better than *Time Crisis Titan*? We're divided on that one. What it is, however, is a better than perfect conversion of the delicious Namco arcade machine, since the Namco arcade uses PS2 technology. Nice.
Time Crisis 3		90%	Though impossible to finish on one credit due to a bullets habit of meeting your head as you pop it round a corner, this is still choice. The hidden mode is effectively another *TC* game too – bargain!
TOCA Race Driver		83%	Driving game with unique narrative approach
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon		65%	A simplified version of the PC and the result is this!
Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness		71%	Lara but not as we know her. Half throttle at best
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3		94%	A piece of interactive art – gorgeously playable
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		95%	The world's biggest child gets his finest playground yet. Bigger parks, more humour and the usual selection of GR8 music combine to give the best SK8ER on the block. *Tony Hawk's 5*? When's that?
Tony Hawk's Underground		90%	Slightly different from the others in the series but hardly different enough to warrant buying this as an addition to the collection. Still, it plays like a dream, it looks superb and the Story mode is arguably the best one player mode in the series.
Top Angler		65%	One of the best fishing games on the market
Top Gear Dare Devil		60%	Sedate but sure, verging on dull
Top Gun: Combat Zones		69%	Not quite the top gun, but a comfortable shooter
Total Club Manager 2004		72%	Superb menus, bad match play
Treasure Planet		58%	Another naff Disney game
True Crime		72%	Good. But nowhere near as good as they said
Turok Evolution2		70%	A silly little game of the highest order
Twin Caliber		59%	Nice idea, pulled off with the grace of a dead cow
Twisted Metal Black		87%	Car combat finally comes of age
Ty The Tasmanian Tiger		70%	Kiddified platformer with stereotypical Aussie accents
UEFA Challenge		79%	Challenge? That doesn't even begin to describe it...
UFC Throwdown		73%	Cumbersome *Ultimate Fighting* sim that needs finesse
Unreal Tournament		86%	Great, but struggling against PS2
Urban Freestyle		30%	From people who just don't understand fun
Vampire Night		72%	Decent lightgun action that lacks any real spark
Vexx		23%	Like having your spine ripped out through your poo duct
Virtua Cop Elite		80%	Exhausted *Time Crisis 2*? Your new challenge begins here
Virtua Fighter 4*		94%	A fighting game for the connoisseur who knows that there is much more on offer here than its surface beauty. Admittedly, it takes a while to get to grips with, but once you do you'll be holding on for dear sweet life.
Virtua Fighter 4		88%	Not quite as tasty as *Tekken 4*, but still fairly solid
Virtua Tennis 2		90%	To say that this one makes all other tennis games totally redundant isn't that far fetched. If the game can be recreated better than this them it's currently being coded in heaven. Tennis is simple, this is simply brilliant. Simple.
V-Rally 3		90%	Hello to you Career mode and welcome to you, your chance to race other cars you. Although not up there with the Flying Scotsman (*CMR*), this racing game from Atari still has enough to make it a worthwhile addition.
Wakeboarding Unleashed		83%	An absolute gentleman
Wacky Races		65%	Charmless toony racer aimed at the nostalgic crown...
Wallace & Gromit		69%	Beautiful Plasticine animation, average game
War Of The Monsters		60%	Further evidence to misunderstand Americans with
Way Of The Samurai		78%	A game with few small, yet glaring faults
Weakest Link		80%	Here's to you, Mrs Robinson...
Whiplash		67%	Humorous but fails to lift above stale gaming
Whiteout		56%	Twenty quid is still a lot to pay for this average racer
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire		66%	All the fun of the TV show without the money
Wild Arms 3		82%	Pleasing adventure let down by being a little dull
Wild Wild Racing		64%	Competent but ultimately wearing racer
Winning Eleven 7		90%	The Japanese *PES3*'s a winner too!
Wipeout Fusion		90%	What did you expect – it's *Wip3out*, but with all the backing of the power of a PS2 – it's minty! The game that brought console action to the clubs returns and it's very much a good thing. Got any water?
Wolverine's Revenge		49%	Logan gets an absolute beasting
World Racing		28%	Depressing
World Championship Snooker		82%	Won't convert snooker haters, but still a solid simulation
World Championship Snooker 03		88%	Better than sex with a shaved bonobo
Worms 3D		86%	Initially strange but eventually just as good as the others
Worms Blast		68%	Lacks the weapons, skill and humour of the series
Wrath Unleashed		33%	A disgusting game
WRC		74%	An excellent rally engine, let down by blasé course design
WRCII: Extreme		85%	Fully licensed rally game that really has to be looked at
WRC III		91%	*McRae* has more depth of handling but *WRC* is quicker, slicker and a lot more forgiving. There are moments in *WRC3* that remind you why games are great and simulators are dull. Fun driving all round.
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions		77%	Hectic racer that fails to truly inspire or offend
WWE Crush Hour		48%	Codswallop, plain and simple
WWE! Here Comes The Pain		94%	You don't have to have friends to enjoy this game – but it does help. This is maniacal multiplayer mayhem and with a massively improved on loner mode compared to previous instalments, although it's still far from perfect. A powerslam of a game.
WWE! Just Bring It		90%	Our wrestling mad reviewer enjoys yet another wrestling game from the *Smackdown* line. He loved it, he thought it was amazing. Then again, he likes wrestling. If you like wrestling then please, be our guest...
WWE! Shut Your Mouth		90%	If you like wrestling then... zzzzzzzzzzzz... The fact is the *Smackdown!* series is proving to be the most playable, visually stunning and comprehensive button-basher of all time. You don't have to like wrestling to enjoy these games, you just have to like fun.
X-Squad		59%	Shooter with squandered potential
X-Men		56%	Admantium skeleton? Brittle bones more like
XIII		84%	Trial and error gameplay stops this being a classic
Xenosaga Ep 1		83%	More cut-scenes disguising a quality RPG
ZOE		80%	Good looking but shallow shooter

arcade shoot-'em up | beat-'em-up | first-person shooter | party/puzzler | platformer | racing game | sports title | strategy/adventure

* Indicates an import review

STATION MASTER

Beautiful women. The rarest of all of God's creatures. Occasionally, you may see one and might even be fortunate enough to stumble into conversation with them, hell, even a relationship. But then a tongue drenched in the bitter dialogue of a Christian Dior disciple rips the beauty away as if it were never there. The gleaming smiles and sparkling eyes of yester-year soon become shallow pleads for different men and the women give chase to the beauty that left them long ago. Men mourn for the fleeting moment where once they had managed to capture beauty itself, only to now receive an e-mail from its canvas once every so often.

If only they had saved that beauty to disc...

Fear not fellow gamers, for *FFX-2* is here with three (yes, three) of the most beautiful women you're ever not likely to see, all waiting with heaving-chest-inducing bated breath for you to control them. To help you on your way, Station Master brings you the second part of its *FFX-2* guide.







STATION

GUIDES
Cheats/Hints/Q&As

FINAL FANTASY X-2
092 Part two of our massive walk-through.

NEW CHEATS
098 New cheats for all those games you still own but couldn't complete.

CLASSIC CHEATS
099 Oldies but goodies – to help you clear out that backlog of great games you haven't got around to finishing yet..

HOW DOES IT ALL WORK?

STATION MASTER
Getting the most out of your games.

WHAT WE SAID
We take a brief look back at what we thought of the game when we reviewed it.

CODES/UNLOCKABLES/SECRETS
If there's stuff to unlock in the game and codes to find it then we'll endeavour to box them out here.

RUNNING Q&AS
If you've missed a guide in the past and have a specific query we'll print it and solve it here.



SCREENSHOTS
We'll illustrate our guides as best as possible by using relevant screenshots and annotations.

MAIN GUIDE
The brunt of the guide rests here. In this particular instance we're exposing some useful tips.

STATION

WHAT WE SAID...

The first genuine sequel in the *Final Fantasy* series is both everything we've ever wanted from one but also everything we'd been concerned about. Revisiting old haunts is both a beautiful (naturally) and nostalgic experience but despite new battle systems, this just isn't a standalone game. 84%



Knowing your surroundings is key to victory.



The epic journey will soon draw to a close.



WRITTEN BY
RUSSELL MURRAY

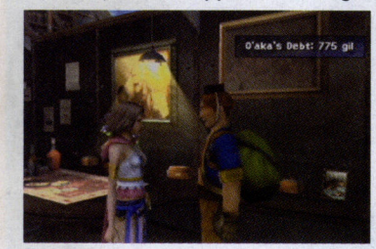
FINAL FANTASY X-2

CHAPTER 3

"Spira is over-run by fiends, and only Yuna and her friends can stop them"

MISSION 1 FRIENDS EVERYWHERE

Spira is in a state of emergency as fiends pour out of temples around the world and people run scared. Yuna and the team will help, of course, but a few other things have happened. Baralai and Nooj have disappeared and again your choice at the start of Chapter 2 affects the hotspots on the map. If you gave the sphere to New Yevon, Bevelle will be a hotspot, and if it was the Youth League, Mushroom Rock Road will be active.



Clearing Oaka's debt is important here!



Reunions can be an emotional affair.

TIP
OAKA

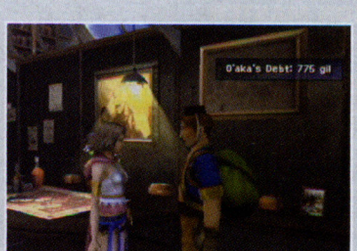
If you have been buying items from Oaka in the cabin area and have managed to clear his debts, he will jump ship at the start of Chapter 3 and head straight back to his travel agency just north of Macalania Woods. He may need a helping hand setting up his new shop, but loads of amazing items can be purchased here later in the game. If you haven't cleared his debt yet, then make this your priority before you attempt to visit the Macalania Woods as the extra goodies come in very handy.

SIDEQUESTS

Once again there are a number of places to visit before you take on the main missions of Chapter 3. It is best to avoid all the hotspots at this point and concentrate on visiting all the other areas first to gain more experience and extra items.

LUCA

As soon as you reach Luca you'll hear about the great Sphere Break Tournament. The grand prize is a dressphere, so use the experience from the last chapter to qualify. Go to the stadium and save your game, then check out the challengers to find easy opponents. Save your game between matches and once you've won three you can take on Shinra for the championship. Use the same number of coins each round to make the core number and you'll soon beat this tricky customer. Using coins with the Item ability can gain you the **Treasure Hunt Garment Grid** from Shinra, unavailable anywhere else. Win the tournament to get the **Lady Luck Dressphere**. Afterwards, head up the stairs and leap over to the left to raid the chest, then continue to the top of the stairs and onto the Mi'ihen Highroad.



Clearing Oaka's debt is important here!

MI'IHEN HIGHROAD

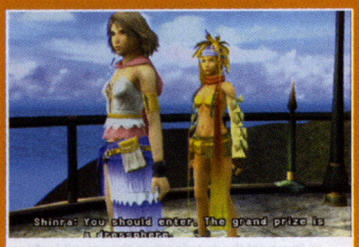
At the Highroad it appears that not only is there a fiend problem, but the Machina are also going crazy. Accept the mission and walk along the road destroying the mechanical monsters. Dash up the road blasting as many as possible and keep an eye on your health. The Dismantler ability, using the gun mage dressphere, can help to kill the mechs quickly. Save your game at the travel agency, then continue along the road and down the path on the right to the old high road. Finish off the Machina to earn **10,000 Gil** and the **Undying Storm Garment Grid**.

BOSS FIGHT
WATCHER

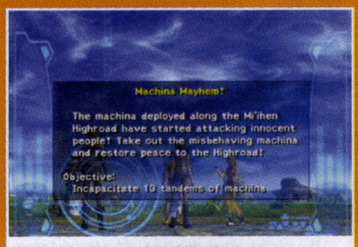
In Chapter 3 the fiends become much tougher, and occasionally you'll face an extra enemy called a watcher. These do not attack you directly but they do act as scouts and will watch your every move. When a watcher is in a battle with you, concentrate your attacks on it first of all and then use only standard weapon attacks in order to avoid giving any clues away as to to your battle technique.



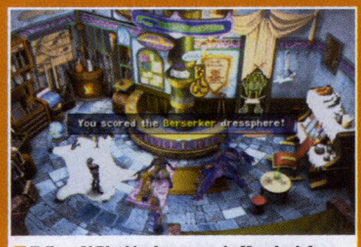
Concentrate on the watcher in a battle!



Enter the competition to win a dressphere!



Use the Dismantler ability here.



Talk to Al Bhed in the agency in Macalania!



In Zanarkland, speak to Isaaru by the stairs.

SIDEQUESTS

DJOSE TEMPLE

When you reach the Djose Temple, talk to Gippal in front of the temple and he'll hand over **Al Bhed Primer XV**. Head south across the bridge to grab a few **Hi-Potions** from the chest, then follow the path north to reach Moonflow.

MOONFLOW

Speak to Tobli a few times and then run as fast as you possibly can down the road towards the Shoopuf port. Take a ride across the water to the other side and then make your way down the road to Guadosalam.

GUADOSALAM

Head straight for Chateau Leblanc and enter the main room to speak with Logos and Ormi. After the conversation head upstairs and speak to Leblanc, then return to the main room and speak to Logos and Ormi again to hear about another sphere they discovered in Bevelle. Walk into the secret passage at the back of the room and then follow the passage past the save sphere and into the room on the right. Watch the spheres to spot Nooj in Bevelle, and then examine the corner of the room for the **Gaol Sphere**. Maechen will appear and tell you more stories. Return to the save sphere and follow the passage to Leblanc's secret room, then open the chest in the corner to collect the **Tetra Band**. Search the other side of the room and climb onto the crate, then follow the small balcony around the top and open the well-hidden chest in the corner to grab **Crimson Sphere 4**. You can now exit the chateau and head south onto the Thunder Plains.

GUADOSALAM

GATEKEEPER

After starting the sidequest in the Bikanel Desert, you will need to return here to find the third gatekeeper, Lobeira. Head down the hidden passageway, then enter Ormi's room directly ahead of you and open the strange chest in the centre of the room. Lobeira is inside and then you can start the mini-game. This shootout is much tougher than the previous ones.

THUNDER PLAINS

The maintenance man is still working on the towers and asks if you have returned to help him. You can try if you wish to calibrate the remaining towers, but it is not necessary. Head to the travel agency and stock up on items, then continue up the path to find Lian and Ayde Ronso. They ask you where you think they may be able to get some information about Kimahri's horn and you can tell them anywhere you wish. In Chapter 4, Lian and Ayde will be in the place you previously suggested. From here, continue to the end of the path and into Macalania Woods.



Lain and Ayde will appear where you wish.

THUNDER PLAINS

GATEKEEPER

After visiting the Bikanel Desert, return here to find Islaya, the sixth Cactuar gatekeeper. Beat him at the shooting game and he will agree to follow you to the Cactuar Nation.

MACALANIA WOODS

Follow the glowing path to the junction and open the chest on the left to collect a **Gold Bracer**, then continue to the end of the path and look at the small lake on the right. Speak to the musicians and they'll tell you about their new friend. Speak to the Gel for the **Howling Wind Garment Grid**. Get your team ready for a battle and then exit the woods to the north. The travel agency is overrun with fiends and you have to defeat them without stopping to heal. Use any time at the end of the battle to cure status ailments and keep an eye on your health levels. Finish all the battles and your reward is the **Pride of the Sword Garment Grid**. You can enter the agency, and inside you'll find an injured Al Bhed. He'll hand over the **Berserker Dressphere** and **Al Bhed Primer I**. Soon after, he passes away and Oaka arrives to pay off his debt. At last he has his shop back and you can return here later for some amazing items.


The decision: who to give the sphere to...

BEVELLE

Your choice at the start of Chapter 2 is important. If you chose to give the sphere to the Youth League you can only progress as far as the gate at this time. If you sided with New Yevon you can witness a fight in front of the temple and will then be returned to the Celsius.

ZANARKAND RUINS

Head straight along the path into the temple, then speak to Isaaru near the stairs. He says there seems to be no change at the temple apart from the monkeys, who are taking over. If you completed the Monkey Love mini-game in the last chapter there is nothing else to do apart from follow the path to the Chamber of the Fayth and collect the items from inside the chests.

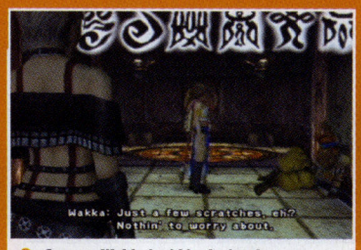
MUSHROOM ROCK ROAD

There isn't much to do apart from talk to Yaibal and Lucil. You can, however, collect **2,000 Gil** from the chest a little further up the road.

CALM LANDS

The first stop is the bottom of the gorge where fiends have trapped tourists inside the cave. Head inside and start saving the tourists. Each has specific needs or requirements and you must take these into account before rescuing them. Of course if you wish to gain more experience you could opt to lead them from the cave one at a time. Use the map to save the tourists in the correct





Come to Wakka's aid in the battle.



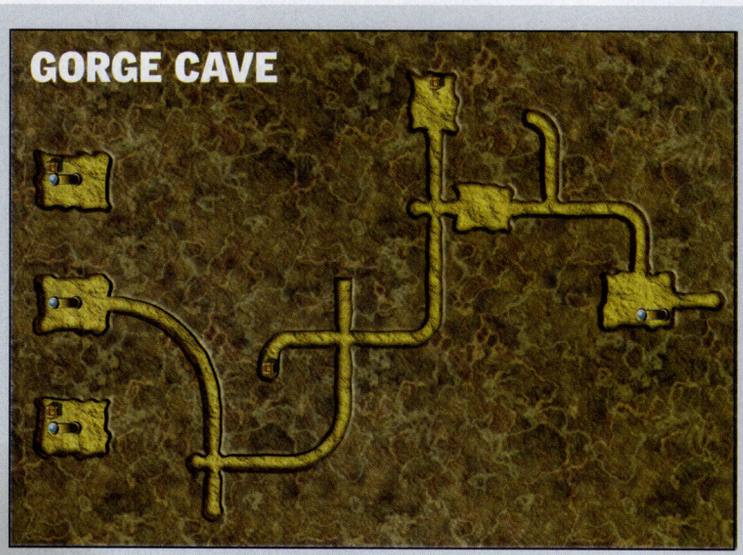
Use this key to unlock a chest with a Search Sphere.


Run past the guards when they aren't looking.

SIDEQUESTS

order. Once you have rescued 13 people, return them to the entrance. You'll be rewarded with the **Energy Cores** required to operate the teleporters and the **Besaid Key**. Exit the cave and speak to the guy on the right for an **Energy Core**.

Return to the cave and use the first teleporter to warp to the back of the cave, then use the teleporter here to gain access to the hidden chamber to the right. Grab the **Lightning Gleam** in the chest, then rescue the tourist and guide him to the cave entrance. He will hand over **Energy Core 8** and you can use the teleporter to return to the back of the cave. Enter the second secret chamber to the left, then grab the **Wall Ring** from the chest and free the last tourist. Return him to the entrance to complete the rescue mission, then head to the back of the cave once more. Use the teleporter to enter the Chamber of the Fayth and get ready to fight (YOJIMBO). Afterwards, you'll be returned to the Celsius, but there are more missions for you to complete in the Calm Lands. Head back to the travel agency, then walk east across the plains to Clasko's chocobo ranch. Here you can view the chocobos that you have captured and feed them greens to raise their levels. Feed them all, then send a few out around Spira to search for items. Head back to the gorge and return to the Chamber of the Fayth to collect a **Star Bracer** from inside a hidden chest located near by.



MT GAGAZET

Speak to Kimahri. He will hand over the **Trainer Dressphere** and you can head up the mountain. Follow the Ronso youth, fighting random battles and activating the teleporters en route. When you reach Fayth Scar continue past the cliffs and into the cave, then activate the teleporters and follow the path to the open area where you'll catch up with (GARIK).

BIKANEL DESERT

Nhadala asks Benzo to accompany you to the Cactuar Nation to speak with Marnela. When you arrive Marnela will talk of a huge fiend buried beneath the sand and ask for your help to find the ten gatekeepers who are on location around Spira (GATEKEEPERS 2). When you have finished here, ride back to camp and go to the Oasis where you'll find a caravan selling items and also see Lobivia, the first of the gatekeepers.

BOSS FIGHT GARIK

Garik is no pushover and can have a few helping hands depending on how well you answered their questions in the first two chapters. If you have the gun mage dressphere equipped you can learn the Blue Bullet Mighty Guard from Garik and also steal a **Mythril Bangle**. Use your strongest attacks on Garik and try to reduce his MP to stop him using magic attacks and defences. Keep pummelling away and soon the battle will end and Garik will agree not to go to battle with the Guado. After it's over, you'll receive the **Wishbringer Garment Grid** and can return to the Celsius.

BOSS FIGHT YOJIMBO

Most of Yojimbo's attacks are very powerful and he has the ability to reduce your MP to zero, making magic attacks impossible. Use your strongest attacking dresspheres and equip anti-poison items. Keep whacking away and use a chocobo wing if necessary to speed up the rate of attack. You can steal a **Power Wrist** from Yojimbo if you have the mug ability or a thief in your party and watch out for his Zanmato attack that can reduce your entire party to 1HP and 1MP. If you win this battle you'll be rewarded with a **Recovery Bracer** and the **Tetra Master Garment Grid**.



Steal a Power Wrist here if you have a thief.

CARAVAN

By the Oasis there is a group of Hypellos offering accessories for sale. This is the only place you can buy some of these items, so use your spare cash and grab a few while you can!

Item	Price
Black Choker	4,000
Potpourri	4,000
Gris-Gris Bag	4,000
Pearl Necklace	4,000
Dragonfly Orb	4,000
Pretty Orb	4,000
Chaos Shock	15,000
Fury Shock	15,000
Lag Shock	15,000
System Shock	15,000

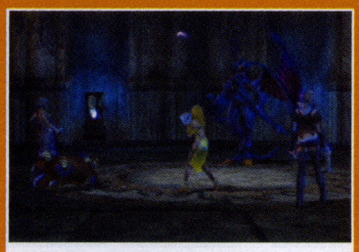
GATEKEEPERS

Speak to the Cactuar Mothers and they'll give you a few clues. You can only track down the first six gatekeepers in this chapter and will have to find the rest in chapter five. Once you have found one, you must compete in a shooting mini-game and they'll agree to return to their mothers.

Gatekeeper	Location
Lobivia	Oasis
Toumeya	Besaid Island
Lobeira	Guadosalam
Areg & Arroja	Clam Lands
Islaya	Thunder Plains

GATEKEEPERS

After visiting the Bikanel Desert, return to the Calm Lands and walk south towards Mount Gagazet. Just after passing the bridge you'll find the gatekeepers Areq and Arroja riding merrily around on their chocobo. Stop them to play (and win) the shooting mini-game and then be sure to return the two to the Cactuar Nation.


The Daevas are tough enemies!



Step in when they finish.



Collect this sphere when they are gone.


The temple is home to another side quest.

MISSION 2

BESAID ISLAND

Go down the hill into the village and speak to Lulu to get the lowdown on what's been happening since you left. After the conversation, head outside and speak to Shinra about the Comm spheres and you'll overhear an argument between Wakka and Beclem about the temple. Dash to the temple and speak to Beclem, then head up the stairs to help Wakka. Once inside the temple battle the fiends that appear, then make your way down the steps and along the corridor to catch up with your buddy. It seems that the fiends are all appearing from the Chamber of the Fayth, so step onto the lift and ride to the bottom to meet (VALEFOR).

After the battle you're returned to the Celsius, but there is still plenty more for you to do on Besaid Island. Return to the village and visit the temple again, then use the key you were given in the Calm Lands to unlock the chest and grab the **Search Sphere**. Go to the room next door and talk to the man to find out how to use the search sphere, then set out to find the next four ciphers. Walk into the village and search between the huts on the left to find a small shelter. Use the search sphere to pinpoint the exact spot, then dig up the sphere under the ground. Now use the camera to search the local area and look for a glowing number nearby. Once you've found it, head out of the village and use the sphere again in the area where the Aurochs are training to uncover another sphere. Use the camera to zoom in on the second cipher on the cliff top, then continue along the path towards the beach. Search the path near the waterfalls to find another camera sphere, then zoom in to discover another cipher on the cliff top.

To find the last hidden cipher, continue down towards the cave and search the small ledge over the pool. Dig up the last camera sphere and look at the trees on the cliff opposite to grab the last digit. Return to the cave and go in, then search the first passage on the right for another keypad. Enter the code, then follow the passage to the cliff top. Head left along the ledge and open the chest at the end to collect the **Raging Giant Garment Grid**.

BOSS FIGHT VALEFOR

This aeon is pretty mean and has attacks that can cripple your party very quickly. Use one character for healing wounds and keep yourself up on the battle, then use your two strongest physical dresspheres or magic attacks. Watch out for Valefor's Sonic Wing that reduces your MP and switch dresspheres or use an ether so you can keep fighting. Keep battling and soon the creature will fall so you can claim a **Moon Bracer**.

GATEKEEPER

Take the time to explore the beach while in Besaid and you'll find Toumeya, the second Cactuar gatekeeper. Play the shooting mini-game and defeat Toumeya and he'll come with you back to Cactuar Nation.

SIDEQUESTS

BEVELLE

When you arrive in Bevelle, the first thing you'll see is Gippal heading into the temple. Quickly rush to the temple, then jump into the lift and ride to the top. Head through the door and speak to the people on the rooftop to receive the **Electrocutioner** accessory and a **Hypno Crown**. Ride the lift back to the ground floor and alter the drive settings again like you did in the previous chapter, then ride the central lift down to the basement. Walk forwards towards the save point and you'll see Gippal by the sphere. Save your progress and grab the **Chocobo Feathers** from the chest, then follow Gippal into the undercity. Go back to the chamber where Vegnagun was being hidden and you'll witness a strange scene with Nooj, Baralai and Gippal. After the conversation you rush in to stop the madness and must fight a Malboro. As soon as the battle is over all three leaders will have gone and you can collect **Crimson Sphere 1** from the floor. Now jump onto the airship to watch your new sphere.

BOSS FIGHT IFRIT

This aeon is also a nasty creature, and can soak up any fire element attacks and use them to heal himself. Cast Blizzaga to cause major damage to this creature and keep hitting it with your most powerful physical attacks at each round. Have a White Mage of Alchemist with the party to heal should things become difficult. You can steal a **Fiery Gleam** from Ifrit during the battle and will be rewarded with some **Angel Earrings** when the battle is over.



You can steal a Fiery Gleam in this fight.

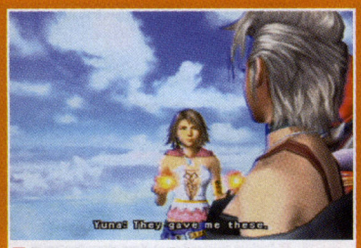
MISSION 3

KITTIKA ISLAND

Go down the hill into the village and speak to Lulu to get the lowdown on what's been happening since you left. After the conversation, head outside and speak to Shinra about the Comm spheres and you'll overhear an argument between Wakka and Beclem about the temple. Dash to the temple and speak to Beclem, then head up the stairs to help Wakka. Once inside the temple battle the fiends that appear, then make your way down the steps and along the corridor to catch up with your buddy. It seems that the fiends are all appearing from the Chamber of the Fayth, so step onto the lift and ride to the bottom to meet (VALEFOR).

After the battle you're returned to the Celsius, but there is still plenty more for you to do on Besaid Island. Return to the village and visit the temple again, then use the key you were given in the Calm Lands to unlock the chest and grab the **Search Sphere**. Go to the room next door and talk to the man to find out how to use the search sphere, then set out to find the next four ciphers. Walk into the village and search between the huts on the left to find a small shelter. Use the search sphere to pinpoint the exact spot, then dig up the sphere under the ground. Now use the camera to search the local area and look for a glowing number nearby. Once you've found it, head out of the village and use the sphere again in the area where the Aurochs are training to uncover another sphere. Use the camera to zoom in on the second cipher on the cliff top, then continue along the path towards the beach. Search the path near the waterfalls to find another camera sphere, then zoom in to discover another cipher on the cliff top.

To find the last hidden cipher, continue down towards the cave and search the small ledge over the pool. Dig up the last camera sphere and look at the trees on the cliff opposite to grab the last digit. Return to the cave and go in, then search the first passage on the right for another keypad. Enter the code, then follow the passage to the cliff top. Head left along the ledge and open the chest.



Show the spheres to Paine.



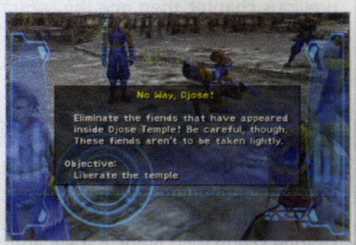
There are items galore in the engine room.



Speak to Shinra to access the CommSpheres.

MISSION 4 KILLIKA ISLAND

When you arrive at the temple it appears that Gippal has not yet returned. Accept the mission to clear the fiends and you'll instantly be rewarded with **Al Bhed Primer XIV**. Head into the temple and climb the stairs towards the Chamber of the Fayth. Walk forwards fighting random fiends, then ride the lift in the centre to the level above. Speak to the guards by the stairs, then head into the room ahead and grab a **Wristband** from the chest. One of the statues here will disable the electric barrier blocking the stairs, so push them one at a time until you find the right one. Head to the stairs and take a moment to heal your wounds, then walk up and get ready to face (IXION). After the battle Yuna falls into the hole and you get to witness more strange events. Just sit back and watch, then after receiving two more spheres the chapter will end.



Liberate the temple from the fiends!



Grab the wrostband from the chest.

BOSS FIGHT IFRIT

Another aeon awaits inside the temple and this time it has been merged with Al Bhed Machina. Ixion is immune to lightning based attacks, so use Watega and Liquid Steel to cause good damage. It is wise to have a healer in your party too as Ixion's attacks can do quite a bit over 2000 damage. Make sure that you manage to steal some **Sprint Shoes** before ending the battle as well, and keep bashing away with your most powerful attacks to bring this aeon down. When you eventually win you'll receive a **Soul Of Thamasa** and the **Unwavering Guard Garment Grid** for your efforts.



You can steal a Fiery Gleam in this fight.

CHAPTER 4

"Yuna must view the action through the CommSpheres"

MISSION 1 BACK ON CELSIUS

Everyone is delighted that Yuna has made it back and Shinra reveals a little more about the mysterious Lenne. After the conversation head to the lift and then ride up to the deck to show the spheres to Paine. She will explain a little of what happened between her and the three leaders and then will head back to the bridge. Take the lift to the engine room and grab the items inside the chests, then head back to the bridge to receive **Al Bhed Primer XI**. Speak to Shinra and you can access the CommSphere Network that he had been busy installing while you battled the fiends in the previous chapter. Access Besaid and speak with Wakka, then check Killika and have a conversation with Dona. The other places to check are Bevelle and Mushroom Rock Road, but be aware that the Mushroom Rock Road CommSphere will be tossed into the ocean if you sided with New Yevon at the start of Chapter 2. Exit the menu and speak to Buddy and you'll decide what to do next. Before heading to Moonflow, it would be a good idea to check the rest of the (COMMSPHERE NETWORK).

MI'IHEN MYSTERY

When you open the CommSphere to Mi'ihen, Rin will ask you to help solve a riddle. Agree and he'll tell you about the CommSpheres he has installed along the Highroad. The idea is to watch the events through these Spheres and call Rin if you see anything suspicious. Depending on the actions you see a different culprit can be framed for the tragedy. Each time you call Rin he sorts out the events and either moves on or tells you that you are getting to the very heart of the matter. Depending on what scenes you witness there are a possible four culprits, Chocobo Eater, The Prophet, Rikku, and even Rin himself.

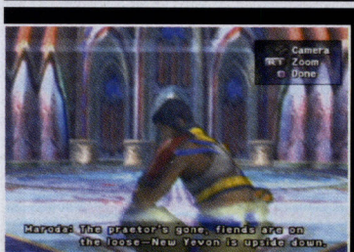


There are four possible culprits for this.

COMMSPHERE NETWORK

With the CommSphere Network fully operational you can check on all the areas in Spira from the comfort of the airship. It is best to visit every location and search around for anything that might be a little strange or out of the ordinary. Use the camera to pan around and zoom in on anything that looks a little suspicious. Each area has several scenes for you to watch and there are major amounts of completion percentages to be gained by watching them all. Here are the number of scenes available in each area, but be careful not to cut the story short or you may not be awarded the bonus.

Area	Scenes
Besaid	7
Killika Port	4
Killika Temple	2
Luca	4
Mushroom Rock Road (Youth League only)	6
Djose Temple	6
Moonflow	5
Guadosalam	7
Thunder Plains	3
Macalania Woods Entrance	2
Macalania Woods Travel Agency	9
Bikanel Desert Camp	2
Bikanel Desert Cactuar Nation	2
Clam Lands Travel Agency	5
Mt Gagazet Gate	2
Mt Gagazet Hot Springs	16
Zanarkand	1



Zoom in on anything that looks suspicious.



Watch each scene all the way through.

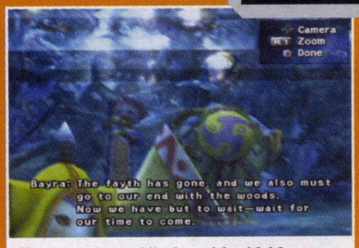


Don't worry - Tobli will appear shortly!


Tobli is only too happy to join your group!



Watch every scene, all the way through!



It may take a while, but stick with it!

MISSION 2 MOONFLOW

When you arrive at the temple it appears that Gippal has not yet returned. Accept the mission to clear the fiends and you'll instantly be rewarded with **Al Bhed Primer XIV**. Head into the temple and climb the stairs towards the Chamber of the Fayth. Walk forwards fighting random fiends, then ride the lift in the centre to the level above. Speak to the guards by the stairs, then head into the room ahead and grab a **Wristband** from the chest. One of the statues here will disable the electric barrier blocking the stairs, so push them one at a time until you find the right one. Head to the stairs and take a moment to heal your wounds, then walk up and get ready to face (IXION). After the battle Yuna falls into the hole and you get to witness more strange events. Just sit back and watch, then after receiving two more spheres the chapter will end.

MISSION 3 THUNDER PLAINS

Once all the Hypello are dropped off around Spira you get a few moments to get organised and rehearse. Go to the save sphere near the bridge and record your data, then head down to the cabin to find Rikku. Your dress rehearsal is about to start and you must do your best to get a reward (DANCE REHEARSAL)..

After the game go back to the bridge and check the (COMMSPHERE NETWORK) to catch up with the events in Spira. Speak to Buddy and he'll land the airship on the Thunder Plains. Things are not quite as planned when you arrive as a few fiends have gatecrashed the party. Head north along the plains and take out all the fiends, then head east to find a small cave. Go in and open all the chests to grab extra items, then jump over the rock platforms to come face to face with (ZALAMANDER).

After the battle open the chest to grab a **Black Ring**, then exit the cave and return to the Celsius. Onboard ask Shinra to look at the crowds outside, then speak to Tobli and the concert begins. Return to the airship and manage to pick up a number of guests. Go to the bridge to speak to Maechen, who tells the story about Lenne. When it's over, go and speak to Leblanc. She hands over **Crimson Sphere 5**. Go to the bridge to watch a communication with the droppedCommSphere.

DANCE REHEARSAL

This mini-game is all about timing. Watch the symbols that appear under Rikku and tap them as fast as possible in time with the music. At the end your points are counted up and you can win one of four prizes. The rewards are as follows:

Score	Prize
0-49	Pearl Necklace
50-99	Safety Bit
100-149	Sublimator
150 or more	Shmooth Shailing

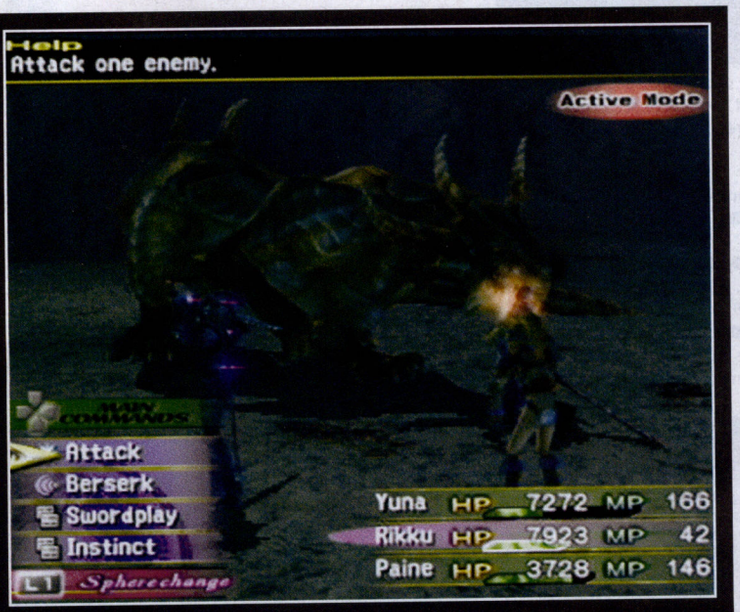
COMMSPHERE NETWORK

Once again the only way to check on the progress of the promotion is to look at the CommSpheres in each area. There are more completion bonuses available for watching all the events in each area, so put your feet up and sit back and watch the action in all its *Final Fantasy X-2* glory. To help you in your progress, you will see a list of the number of scenes in each area to the right, so be sure to watch them all.

Area	Scenes
Besaid	6
Killika Port	4
Killika Temple	Offline
Luca	5
Mushroom Rock Road (Youth League only)	6
Djose Temple	Stolen
Moonflow	4
Guadosalam	8
Thunder Plains	1
Macalania Woods Entrance	6
Macalania Woods Travel Agency	9
Bikanel Desert Camp	1
Bikanel Desert Cactuar Nation	2
Bevelle	1
Mt Gagazet Gate	7
Mt Gagazet Hot Springs	1
Zanarkand	4

BOSS FIGHT ZALAMANDER

This gigantic lizard-like fiend is immune to magical attacks, which could make this battle rather tough. Equip your character with powerful physical dresspheres such as Berserker and Dark Knight, and then use your best attacks in order to weaken this creature. Casting Blind will help you to nullify some of the creature's physical attacks, and then make sure that you cure your party after Zalamander's Flame Breath attack. You can steal a **Sublimator** from this giant during the boss fight and you will also be rewarded with a **Crimson Ring** once the battle is over.



Casting Blind is a good approach here.



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NEW CHEATS

Another Station-Master section that's full of cheats. This month we give you the best of the new *and* the best of the old.

BAD BOYS II

Enter the following code on the press start screen to unlock all the cheats. You can then access them in the Police HQ menu.

CODES
Unlock Cheat Menu
●, ▲, ■, ▲, →, ↓



Seriously, why are you even playing this game?



No, seriously. Why?

MI: OPERATION SURMA



To unlock the level select cheat, enter profiles and highlight Jasmine Curry. Now enter the following code to open every stage. Please note you cannot save when this cheat has been activated.

CODES
Unlock All Levels L1 + R1 + ▲ + ●

STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE



Captains Log, star date issue 100. Enter the following codes at the bridge screen to access all the games secrets:

CHEATS
All Medals and Ranks
L1, R1, L1, ●, R1, ▲, L1, SELECT
All Missions
R1, L1, ●, ■, L1, R1, ▲, SELECT
All Ships L1, ■, L1, ■, R1, R1, ●, SELECT
Invincibility L1, ●, L1, R1, ▲, ▲, ●, SELECT
Kobayashi Maru L1, ▲, L1, L1, ■, ▲, R1, SELECT
Note: These codes may not work on all versions of the game.

WRATH UNLEASHED



Use these monster codes to unlock a few hidden extras in this battle game. Enter the codes on the Main menu or the character select screen.

CODES
Large War Games Characters
(Main Menu)
←, ■, ↑, ●, →, ▲, ↓, ▲
Double Health and Speed
(Main Menu)
↓ x2, ↑, ↓, ←, →, ↓, ↑ x4, →, ←, ■
New Vs and Team Character Variations
(Character Select Screen)
L1 x2, ↓ x2, R2, SELECT, R2, SELECT, R1, L1, R2, R1 x2, SELECT

TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS PLATINUM



Use this code to unlock the level select and also gain access to the hidden level once you have completed the Parisian Back Streets. To enter the code simply pause the game and tap the buttons quickly.
Hold L1 + R2 + ↓ + ▲, then release and press ●, ↑, ■, ▲, →, ↓

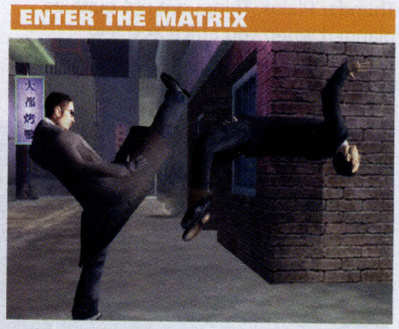
SOCOM: US NAVY SEALS



Complete the game on each difficulty setting and you can open a range of extra features. Here are all the unlockable items in the game.

DIFFICULTY	UNLOCKABLES
Ensign	Lieutenant Jr difficulty and Terrorist Weapons
Lieutenant	Jr Lieutenant difficulty and Level Select
Lieutenant	Lieutenant Commander difficulty and MGL available
Lintenant	Commander Commander difficulty
Commander	Captain difficulty
Captain Rear	Admiral difficulty
Rear Admiral	Vice Admiral difficulty
Vice Admiral	Admiral

ENTER THE MATRIX



In the Hacking mode, use the CHEAT command (in Drive A:)

Infinite focus	**69E5D9E4**
Infinite health	**7F4DF451**
Infinite ammo	**1DDF2556**
Invisibility	**FFFFFFF1**
Double speed	**FF00001A**
Multiplayer fighting	**D5C55D1E**

8

» SSX 3

» I am having difficulty winning Gravitude on *SSX3*. Can you pass on any useful hints and tips to stop me being 'board' stupid!
Andy Pride

Groan! That pun is worse than some of ours! However, I won't hold it against you – so here are three nifty little shortcuts that should help you win every time.

Shortcut 1
A short way into the race there will be a glass sign on the right of the track (if you take the right lane from the start you'll be aiming straight for it). Smashing through here will take you onto a higher track that cuts a few corners and has a few grindable rails that you can build up your adrenalin with. You'll find that a lot of your rivals will take this route, so if you miss it, prepare to play catch-up.

Shortcut 2
After the big drop about quarter of the way down, you'll see a maze of grindable railings. As tempting as they are, ignore them all and head for the glass sign in the centre of them. This path will lead you into cave that cuts through the mountain and drops you back onto the main track. Making use of this should gain you a few places.

Shortcut 3
A little over half way down there will be a smashable sign on your left. Breaking through will take you on to a back slope, which cuts out a few tight corners that you might have trouble with. This path will also take you straight to the river, so make sure you use the ramp to jump or you'll get very wet and lose valuable seconds.

» MCCALL CAN'T BE KILLED!

» Can you help me win the fight with McCall in *XIII*? I just can't seem to cause enough damage to him to kill him before he wastes me. Do you have any advice?
James Bailey

This is a tricky little battle make no mistake. There's a Medkit in the guardhouse to the right, so head straight there. Exit, then head back to where you entered. McCall will probably be between two of the huts, so unleash all your grenades at him with the automatic rifle and blast him until he goes down; it may take a few attempts, but trust us, it can be done! Take his Key and his M60 – lovely stuff! Head through the now open doors and use the key to finally complete the level!

THE SIMS

Life getting you down? Just live a virtual one, made even easier with these cheats.

Press L2 + L2 + R1 + R2 simultaneously on the main menu to bring up the cheats menu. Enter the following codes to unlock these secrets.

CHEATS
MIDAS Unlock all objects, skins and 2 player games
FREEALL All objects free
PARTY M Party Motel 2 player game
SIMS Sims mode
FISH EYES First Person View (press ⊙ to change view)



CLASSIC CHEATS

TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN

CHEAT CODES
In order to get these cheats to work, you need to take note of where the cheat must be entered. If they are input in the wrong place they won't work, so pay attention for winning results.

Restore health
↑, ↓, →, ←, ⊙ x3 (Pause)

Special abilities
Hold L1 + L2 and press ↑ x2, ↓ x2. Release L1 + L2 and press ⊙ x2, R1, R2 (Pause)

Unlock all characters
L1, R2, L2, R1, →, ←, L3, R3 (Start screen)

Unlock demo level
↑, ↓, →, ←, ⊗ x3 (Start screen)

Unlock bonus mission
L1, ↑, R1, ↓, L2, →, R2, ← (Start screen)

Unlock all missions
L1, R1, L2, R2, →, ⊙, L3, R3 (Mission select screen)

Unlock all layouts
R3, L3, R2, L2, R1, L1 (Mission select screen)

Multiplayer missions
L1, R1, L2, R2, →, ⊙, L3, R3 (Mission select screen)

Unlock all items
Hold L1 + R1 and press ↑, ⊙ x2, ←, ⊙ x2, ↓, ⊙ x2, →, ⊙ x2 (Item select screen)

Increase Items
Hold L2 + R2 and press ⊙ x3, ↑, ←, ↓, → (Item select screen)

Unlimited items
L1 + L2 + R1 + R2 and press ⊙ x3, ↑, ←, ↓, →, ⊙, ↑, →, ↓, ← (Item select screen)

Increase score
hold L1 + R1 and press → x2, ← x2 (Pause)(Controller 2)

DISPLAY SCORE AND TIME
→ x2, ← x2 (Pause)(Controller 2)

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

CHEAT CODES
Input the codes in the cheat menu and you can then turn them on/off in the options menu.

Matrix Cheat	nospoon
Moon Gravity	superfly
Perfect Rail Grinds	ssbsts
Perfect Manuals	mullenpower
Max Special Meter	doasuper
Unlock Daisy	(o)(o)

LEGACY OF KAIN: SOUL REAVER 2

BONUS MATERIALS
At the main title screen, enter this code: ←, △, →, △, ↓, ⊙, ⊗. This will unlock more Bonus Materials, including some interesting outtakes.

ONI

PAUSE CODES
Pause the game, highlight 'Help' and press L2, L1, L2, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙ followed by any of the following codes, to hear a sound. To disable a cheat, re-enter it.

Refill Hypo: L2, L1, L2, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙ x3, R3
Level Skip: L3, R3, L2, L1
Invincibility: R3, L3, R3, ⊙
Infinite Phase Cloak: L1, R3, L2, L3
Rapid Fire & Infinite Ammo: L2, L2, L1, L3
One-Hit Kills: L3, R3, ⊙, ⊙
Tiny Character: L3, R3, ⊙, ⊙
Big Characters: R3, ⊙, ⊙, L3
Big Head: START, ⊙, ⊙, START
Flying Enemies: R3, L3, ⊙, ⊙
Enemies fly further when punched or kicked.
Character Select: L2 x4
Press L2 repeatedly to cycle through the characters available on the level.

REZ

UNLOCKABLES
Area 5: Get a 100% ranking in Areas 1–4.
Lost Area: Complete Area 5 in the default game. Or play for a total of five hours.
Trancemission: Get first place in the Lost Area.
Bonus Score Attack Areas: These are unlocked in Score Attack mode when completed during the default game.
Bonus Beam Types: Complete any combination of Areas in Score Attack mode. Every five times this is done, a new beam type is unlocked.
Near View: Get first place in two Areas in Score Attack mode.
Far View: Get first place in three Areas in Score Attack mode.
Dynamic View: Get first place in four Areas in Score Attack mode.
First-Person View: Get first place in five Areas in Score Attack mode.
Zero Form & Second Form Player Skin: Get a 100% ranking in any Area. Or play for a total of five hours.
Third Form Player Skin: Get a 100% ranking in any two Areas. Or play for a total of six hours.
Fourth Form Player Skin: Get a 100% ranking in any three Areas. Or play for a total of seven hours.
Fifth Form Player Skin: Get a 100% ranking in any four Areas. Or play for a total of eight hours.
Final Form Player Skin: Get a 100% ranking in any five Areas. Or play for a total of nine hours.
Morolien Player Skin: Get a 100% ranking in all Areas to unlock the Morolien player skin. Or play for a total of ten hours.
Boss Rush Mode: Get a 95% ranking in Areas 1–5.
Immortality Mode: Complete the 'Direct Assault – Trance' option in the Beyond mode menu.
Over Drive Infinity: Get first place in Boss Rush mode.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

CODES
Enter these codes during gameplay

Blind AI	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙, ←
Fast forward	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙, ↓
Slow motion	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙, →
Shotgun + misc	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙, ↑
Heavy machine gun + mis	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, △, ↓
Rocket launcher + misc	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, △, ←
SMG + misc	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, △, ↑
Sniper + misc	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, △, →
Infinite ammo	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊗, →
Max charisma	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊗, ↓
Nail gun	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊗, ←
FlyMo ragdolls	△, ⊗, ⊙, ⊙, ⊙, ↑

ROCKY

UNLOCK HIDDEN EXTRAS
Hold R1 on the main menu and enter the codes as follows.

Unlock Everything	↑, ↓, ↓, ←, ←, L1
Unlock Rocky Statue	→, →, →, ←, →, L1
Double Punch Damage	→, ↓, ←, ↑, ←, L1
Double Speed	↓, ←, ↓, ↑, →, L1
Max Stats	←, ↑, ↑, ↓, →, L1
Max Stats (Movie mode)	→, ↓, ↓, ↑, ←, L1
Win Fight (Movie mode)	→, →, ←, ←, ↑, L1

(during fight press L2 + R2)

KNOCKOUT KINGS

EXTRA BOXERS
Enter these names (to hear a noise) in Career mode to unlock the secret fighters.
MECCA - Ashy Knucks
AUSTIN - Ray Austin
NELSON - Trevor Nelson
JGIAMBI - Jason Giambi
HATCHER - Charles Hatcher
OSUNA - Bernardo Osuna
DEFIAGBN - David Defiagbon
MRBARRY - Barry Sanders
ZITO - Chuck Zito
BOSTICE - David Bostice
DEMART - David DeMartini

COLIN MCRAE 04

UNLOCKABLES
Win the following events in order to unlock these bonus cars and events:

4WD NORMAL MODE
Unlock Peugeot 206 (4WD)
Unlock Peugeot 205 T16 Evo2 (Group B)
Unlock Group B Championship

4WD ADVANCED MODE
Unlock MGC GTS (Bonus)
Unlock Ford Transit (Bonus)
Unlock Ford RS200 (Group B)
Unlock Expert Championship

2WD NORMAL MODE
Unlock Citroen 2CV (Bonus)
Unlock Volkswagen Rally Golf

If you reach this point and don't have sufficient grenades, then you're better off restarting the level and playing on through until you can reach McCall with more grenades available – they really are the only way to take that mother down!

» SCARED SILLY

How do I beat Captain Kraken in *Ghosthunter*? I get killed before I can cause him any noticeable damage!
Mark Garner

When you first get to the ballroom and are confronted with the Kraken beast, fire at it a few times and avoid its attacks until Fortesque arrives in a tank. He will fire a shell at the beast, which will become lodged somewhere in it. Shoot the shell and it will explode, releasing a soul from Kraken. It's difficult to spot but once you do, capture it like you would any other ghost, being careful to avoid Kraken's attacks. You need to capture another two souls in the same way, so blast those shells. The important thing is to keep moving otherwise Kraken's projectiles and tentacles will quickly reduce your health. Once the three souls are captured the fight will be over.

MORE Q&A NEXT ISSUE

play™



HIGHBURY - PARAGON